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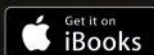
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**STAR WARS**

"It's only been positive"



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"There's always another way to bend the story"



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Rants & Raves

INSIDE THE SFX HIVE MIND

RICHARD EDWARDS EDITOR

RAVES

→ Belatedly saw *Arrival* and it was one of my fave films of 2016 – a Hollywood sci-fi movie that makes you think.
→ Our feature on *The Expanse* (p66) persuaded me to belatedly watch season one – and it's ace.
→ I'm intrigued to see what Noah Hawley does with the X-Men universe in *Legion*.



NICK SETCHFIELD FEATURES EDITOR

RAVES

→ Pleased to discover Spider-Man will have Ditko-style underarm webbing in *Homecoming*. Yes, deodorant's a wonderful thing, but I always loved that creepy-cool early '60s visual.
→ Doug Jones is a great pick to play the new alien science officer in *Star Trek: Discovery*.



IAN BERRIMAN REVIEWS EDITOR

RAVES

→ Had a great day on-set for Duncan Jones's new film *Mute*, in Berlin. Really looking forward to it.
→ Delighted that the label Finders Keepers are releasing music from *The Moomins*.
→ Classic *Who* fans, fancy some belly laughs? Then point your browser at <http://bit.ly/k9titles>.



JOSH WINNING NEWS EDITOR

RAVES

→ *Supergirl* season two is ace. Missing Cat but loving the new HQ and cast additions. Plus, Alex, sob.
→ *Spider-Man: Homecoming* trailer is predictably super. Welcome back, Spidey!
RANTS
→ *Westworld* not returning until 2018?! Does not compute!



RUSSELL LEWIN PRODUCTION EDITOR

RAVES

→ Number of cinemas I visited for first time in 2016: 12. UK running total: 88. Onward!
→ As much as I enjoy Gareth Roberts's tweets, how does he get time to do any work?
RANTS
→ Getting a cold just before the work Christmas party. Then not being able to go and see *Moana*.



JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

RAVES

→ It's been around for a while but I rediscovered this excellent Wes Anderson X-Men parody off the back of the Christmas H&M advert. Really well done: <http://bit.ly/sfxwes>.
→ Maybe it's the suit, or the way he moves, but the new Spidey trailer kinda reminds me of the '70s TV series, which I loved.



CLIFF NEWMAN ART EDITOR

RAVES

→ My expectations of *Westworld* were high and the *Jurassic Park-Memento*-Western didn't disappoint. An excellent re-imagining of a classic. I'm already looking forward to season two.
→ The *Spider-Man: Homecoming* trailer is great. My Spidey-senses are all a tingle.



WILL SALMON SPECIALS EDITOR

RAVES

→ Happy new year! *Doctor Who* and *Twin Peaks* are back in the next few months. 2017 is already looking brighter.
→ I rather like Terry Moore's new comic, *Motor Girl*. It's like a gentler *Love & Rockets*.
RANTS
→ Negan. Negan Negan Negan. Please, go away, you're boring.



SARAH DOBBS WRITER

RAVES

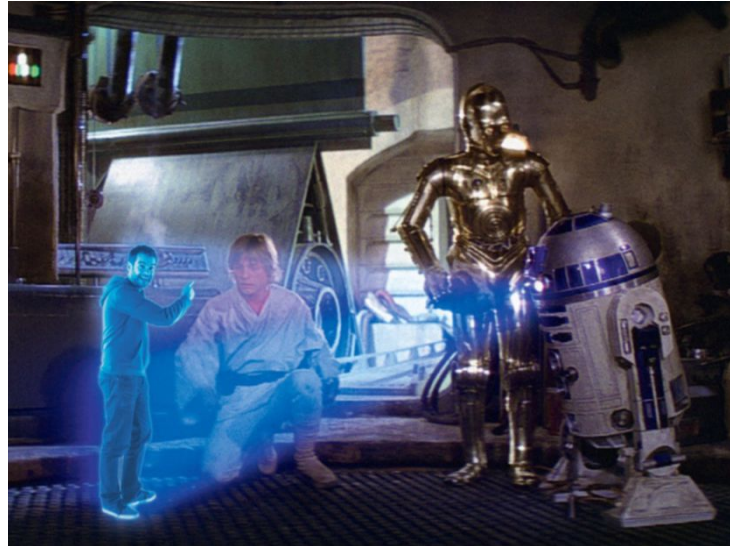
→ The *Ghostbusters* Blu-ray is amazing. The film looks incredible – particularly the black-bar breaking ghosts! – and there are so many extras I'll still be watching them next Christmas.
RANTS
→ That trailer for *The Mummy* looks dodgy. Might just watch the Karloff one again instead.



MIRIAM McDONALD WRITER

RAVES

→ Why are so many comic adaptations on telly ultimately so disappointing? *The Flash* has disappeared up its own alternate history, *Legends Of Tomorrow* is tedious, *Supergirl* and *Jessica Jones* not much better. Thank goodness *Wonder Woman* is getting a movie; I dread to think what would happen to her on the small screen.



Happy new year!
It's an old greetings card cliché that “life begins at 40” and as *Star Wars* approaches its fifth decade, it's arguably healthier than it's ever been – a new movie every year (read our review of the brilliant *Rogue One* on p94), a TV series, an empire of books and comics expanding the mythology of a galaxy far, far away... These are exciting times.

So we're starting the birthday celebrations early, with a massive feature (p44) looking back on 40 years of a franchise that's shaped popular culture like no other. We hear from Carrie “Princess Leia” Fisher, Jeremy “Boba Fett” Bulloch and uber-fan Steve Sansweet, trace the history of *Star Wars*, look back at Marvel's original *Star Wars* comic, and even give some love to the oft-overlooked Prune Face.

Back on planet Earth, we've got loads of comic book-inspired TV action: we grill one of the brains behind *Legion*, an X-Men story like nothing you've seen before (p70); we find out what's in store for the proto-Commissioner Gordon in *Gotham* (p74); and get the skinny on how *Ghost Rider*'s going to impact Marvel's *Agents Of SHIELD* (p78).

We'll have lots more *Star Wars* coverage in 2017, plus *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, *Stranger Things 2*, *Alien: Covenant* and more. Why not subscribe to SFX to make sure you stay ahead of the action – details on p42.

See me
on page
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Rich

Richard Edwards, Editor
@RichDEdwards

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Red Alert

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ON-SET EXCLUSIVE!

FUTURE SHOCK

Red Alert heads on set to salute *The White King*, the year's most prescient sci-fi...



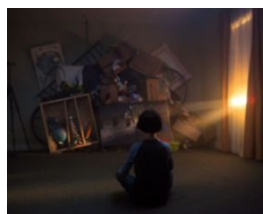
In the gloom of an ancient church

nested in the Hungarian capital of Budapest, a giant picture of Jonathan Pryce looms large. No, the High Sparrow has not returned to grace the next season of *Game Of Thrones*. Rather, Pryce's Colonel Fitz is one of the key figures in new movie *The White King*, a dystopian tale that marks the directorial debut of husband-and-wife team Alex Helfrecht and Jörg Tittel.

Based on the 2005 book by Hungarian author György Dragomán, which was set in a totalitarian state reminiscent of Ceausescu-era Romania, the writer-directors have transposed the action to the 21st century. Not that you'd immediately know it. Staged in an unnamed country, known only as the Homeland, it seemingly belongs to a bygone era, explaining why Helfrecht dubs the film "a historical drama set in the future".

With extras dressed in drab military uniforms that belong to nowhere in particular, the most disconcerting sight is the swastika-like yellow pitchfork symbol. "That's the flag of the Homeland – the country's flag," explains Helfrecht. "It's ruled by the military. We don't see them too much but we see them in the planes and the drones that fly overhead; →

Highlights



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DANCING WITH THE DEVIL

→ A spot of exercise with new horror *Incarnate*.



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X-FILES: FIRST CLASS

→ Mulder and Scully head back to high school. A- for effort.



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FEMALE OF THE SPECIES

→ The Wasp and the other Hawkeye take centre stage in new Marvel series.

SCI-FACT! The android used in *The White King* is a real android (called Sophia) shipped in especially for the film.

“It’s about a boy’s love for his father and his father being taken away from him”

everything is peripheral visually. You get the feeling it’s a blanket of oppression.”

With its dictatorship celebrating the 30th anniversary of its independence, *The White King* recalls George Orwell’s classic novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – with its omnipotent CCTV-surveillance, rationing and its very own Big Brother-style figure, the eponymous leader seen only as a giant statue bestriding the land. But unlike Orwell’s Winston Smith, Dragomán’s hero is a 12-year-old boy – Djata (Lorenzo Allchurch).

When the story begins, Djata loses his father Peter (Ross Partridge), imprisoned in a gulag for political dissent. “It really is about family versus government,” says Tittel. “It’s about a boy’s love for his father and his father being taken away from him – that allows him to grow and realise the world he lives in. He has to decide whether he wants to fight for the family and make a change.” Adds Helfrecht: “It’s really about, ‘How do people behave under duress inside a regime?’”

Joining Djata in this fight is his young mother Hannah (Agness Deyn), who finds that her in-laws – Pryce’s Colonel Fitz and Fiona Shaw’s Kathrin – are too entrenched in the Homeland hierarchy to reveal where their son has been imprisoned. “As soon as Peter is taken away, she has to stand up and protect herself, her son, their morals as a family,” reveals Deyn, dressed in a grey blouse and blue skirt. “She goes from being crouched on the ground to standing up.”

Pryce, who famously starred in Terry Gilliam’s own Orwellian fantasy *Brazil*, immediately acknowledges the film’s political resonances. “You look at this dystopian society and you look at a society that has built barriers and walls, led by this seemingly benign dictatorship,” he says. “And they’re fed lies and distortions and you can’t help but think... I’m not saying Britain will end up in cities torn down and we’ll become an agrarian society, but it’s an example of how a society is sublimated.”

Indeed, the timing of *The White King* couldn’t be more acute. The film received its world premiere at the



Djata has an encounter with a chess-playing android.

Edinburgh International Film Festival just days before Britons voted to leave the European Union. “In the Q&A in Edinburgh,” says Pryce, “I said as a warning: ‘If you imagine that statue in the film being replaced by a statue of Nigel Farage holding aloft a pint of beer!’”

Back on set, sitting calmly as the crew reset the lights, Fiona Shaw, the Irish actress famed for playing Harry Potter’s aunt, concurs, noting the film is about the way we can give in to regimes. “The scene we’re doing now... if you have to make a choice between the system and [your] son, then you’re in trouble,” she says. “The same thing happened in Ireland with the Catholic Church – people handed over their rational judgement to a church. It’s an absolutely catastrophic thing to do.”

Shot entirely on location in Hungary – including a former air force base and along the banks of the Danube – Tittel is very clear about the approach he and Helfrecht wanted when it came to the tone. “I’m a huge Paul Verhoeven fan but we didn’t want to go Paul Verhoeven with it, where everything becomes satirical,” he says. “We didn’t want to veer into caricature; we wanted to create something that feels real.”

Certainly, *The White King* is subtle with its nods to future tech (which are largely hidden from plain view). “You have a radio-phone which is a propaganda device,” explains Tittel. “It looks like an Apple product. Not that we’re critical of Siri in any way!” (Curiously, one of the crew members is wearing a t-shirt that says: “Thank you Steve Jobs.”) “But it’s about more than machines, says Deyn: “I think it’s about the indestructibility of the soul.” ●

The White King opens in cinemas on 27

January and is released on DVD on 30

January. It’s reviewed on page 103.



Hannah (Agness Deyn) will walk through a storm for her son...





Military regimes are never the most relaxing of things.



Djata (Lorenzo Allchurch) is the unlikely young hero with family problems.

THE PRYCE IS RIGHT

Chatting to Jonathan Pryce on set...



What kind of a man is the colonel?

→ It's one thing when you read it on the page, but I find that my views of who I'm playing change over the course of the shoot. He's retired during the course of the film, but he's still a functioning colonel who supposedly had some power, but obviously not enough to get his son back from wherever they've taken him. I'm still finding out about him. He's a powerful military man - but not powerful enough.

Is the film a mix between dystopian drama and sci-fi?

→ It's definitely a drama but the society's dystopian, so... I don't know how brutal the film itself will turn out to be, but it's a look at a brutal society. I imagine the film ultimately will be quite dark, but because you're seeing it through the eyes of a 12-year-old boy, it's going to be leavened by that. You see him interact with his mates, the naughty boys.

Is it quite different working on something as independent as this after *Game Of Thrones*?

→ I've just come from another independent film, which was shot in Canada, and they're great to do. On *Game Of Thrones*, the amount of commitment from people working on it was incredible. It felt big because when there are big sets these days it's often just CGI, but when they said, "Do you want to come and look at the throne room?" it was this vast, huge building. It's bigger than most sound stages. They built the actual thing, it's massive. Then the independent films, the recent ones I've made, *Listen Up Philip* and *The Healer*, they're very low-budget, shot very fast. The contrast is great.

How has it been working with first-time directors?

→ Ah, the directors with an "S"! They have been great. It's day one and I've not wanted to kill them! I hadn't met Jorg, but I'd met Alex before I arrived. It's interesting. I liked the script very much and that's about it, really. They obviously have no track record! I liked the idea of it. It's a quite powerful script.

SCI-FACT! Josh Holloway has revealed that season two of *Colony* will be even darker than the first.

SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

ATTACK THE BLOC

The Bowman family are torn apart in *Colony* season two...

➔ Like your sci-fi with a dose of real-world allegory? Well, look no further than smart sci-fi drama *Colony*, which returns for its second season this month. Set in a near-future Los Angeles that's been occupied by extraterrestrials, the show's new season will, according co-creators Carlton Cuse (*Lost*) and Ryan Condal, dive deeper into what happens to humanity confined to blocs under military occupation. It'll be, in a word, even more epic.

"This season has 150 per cent more sci-fi stuff than we did last year," Condal tells Red Alert. "Now, I qualify that by saying for me a lot of sci-fi is about ideas versus seeing interstellar battles. But there has been a lot of curiosity about [seeing the mysterious "Raps"] from our fans, and we've always wanted to get into that, but we wanted to create a baseline for the show that didn't make people feel they had to buy into a science fiction show in order to get behind it. We wanted to serve up a family drama that played like a John le Carré novel with a crazy sci-fi backdrop. Now it feels like we accomplished that and we're over that hurdle."

Following the family of Katie (Sarah Wayne Callies) and Will Bowman (Josh Holloway), season two finds the couple separated as Will looks for their missing son in the heavily fortified Santa Monica bloc, while Katie struggles in the Los Angeles bloc with the

outcome of her Resistance work.

Condal teases: "We will see Will running around in Santa Monica a good bit. But we also have a whole story we are telling outside the main walls of the Los Angeles colony. Part of our edict, as far as the sci-fi stuff, was to open up the world more. So we are showing more of what the world looks like, not just outside the LA colony, but the west coast and the larger geography to get a sense of what this whole [occupation] looks like."

However, many of the most important conflicts this season will happen on a more intimate front, as the contingent of humans (Proxys) assisting the alien overlords starts tightening their screws on the resisting sections of humanity. "It's about the nature of extremes," Condal says. "You have an extreme change of balance with a military occupation, and in order to maintain order, you have a more extreme form of law enforcement and government than everybody is used to. And then that results in a Resistance movement, and that's countered with more extremity. It's increasing battles of extremism."

Citing real historical events that inspired the series' creation, Condal says, "When the Berlin Wall finally came down, the worst days in East Germany were just before it fell. I read the statistic that under Stalin's Russia, one in four thousand people were spying against their own people. Under Hitler's Germany, it was one in two thousand. In East Germany, it was one in every 63 people who were informing on friends, family or neighbours. It was the result of the increasing darkness of the state, which is what we are seeing play out this season."

He adds: "We are also seeing a more extreme version of the resistance. Last year, we had a point of view into the main resistance with Broussard (Tory Kittles) and Katie's cell. This year, we do not have a POV into it, so as the audience you will be experiencing this more propaganda driven resistance movement purely from the outside as the citizens of LA are too." ●

Colony returns to the USA Network from 11 January 2017. It airs on Sky 1 in the UK.



Broussard (Tory Kittles): still flying the flag?

“This season has 150 per cent more sci-fi stuff than we did last year”



Katie (Sarah Wayne Callies) finds the toughest job is family.

“DON'T QUOTE ME”
 “IF IT'S UP TO JAMES GUNN, YOU'RE GOING TO SEE A GROOT/ROCKET MOVIE AFTER AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR. I THINK THAT'S HIGHLY POSSIBLE.”

Vin Diesel is keen on a super-smash-'em-up.

© REX (1)

AERIAL ASSAULT SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

→ Animated comedy series **Final Space** – produced by Conan O'Brien and following an astronaut named Gary – will debut in 2018.
 → Netflix has renewed **Luke Cage** for a second season.
 → **Westworld** won't return for a second season until 2018.
 → The **Inhumans** TV series will be exec produced by Iron Fist's Scott Buck.
 → **Leftovers** season three will air in April 2017.
 → **Sense8** will return for a second season on Netflix on 5 May 2017.
 → Doug Jones (**Hellboy**) has joined **Star Trek: Discovery** as an alien. Meanwhile, Michelle Yeoh will play Starfleet Captain Georgiou.
 → Anne Rice is planning a **Vampire Lestat** TV series now that she has the rights to the character back.
 → Parker Posey has joined the cast of the **Lost In Space** remake. She'll play Dr Smith, the character originally played by Jonathan Harris.



DANI FILTH

THE CRADLE OF FILTH AND DEVILMENT VOCALIST ON HIS GENRE FAVOURITES...

First SF/fantasy film you saw

→ On Thursday nights BBC Two used to run a sci-fi or monster movie. I think the one that really stuck with me was *Alien*. Especially the chestbuster scene with John Hurt. That's a shocking moment as a youth.

Favourite SF/fantasy film

→ Everybody says *Star Wars* but it's brilliant. It's the whole reminiscing about when you discovered it and buying toys. Growing up, it was just everywhere. I used to get annuals for Christmas and they'd have all these weird and wonderful stories involving Princess Leia and Darth Vader meeting on planets and you'd go: "They're enemies!" Because you never knew anything about politics back then. You didn't realise there were Switzerlands in space.

Favourite SF/fantasy comic

→ I used to be really into *2000 AD*. Judge Dredd, Judge Anderson – being psychic, she used to fight the Dark Judges. The last movie, *Dredd*, was awesome and I read somewhere that they're going to expand on the Judge Anderson/Judge Dredd thing and bring in the Dark Judges [in a sequel]. That'd be incredible.

SF/fantasy guilty pleasure

→ *Blake's 7*. I rewatched a few episodes recently and suddenly realised how bloody awful it was. It was probably great when you were young. *Buck Rogers* I used to love, too, if not just for Wilma Deering. Everybody grew up on stuff like that, but when you revisit it it looks really shabby.

Devilment's album, *Devilment II – The Mephisto Waltzes*, is out now via Nuclear Blast. *Cradle Of Filth's* new album is coming out in 2017.



SCI-FACT! *Incarnate* co-stars *Games Of Thrones*'s Melisandre (Carice Van Houten) and *Gotham*'s Bruce Wayne (David Mazouz).

5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

INCARNATE

Aaron Eckhart turns exorcist for *Mysterious Island* director **Brad Peyton**. Red Alert gets the scoop

THIS IS NOT YOUR PARENTS' EXORCISM MOVIE

1 With the original *Exorcist* now a weekly TV series, there's no denying the big-screen genre it spawned could stand to shed a trope or two. That's something filmmaker Brad Peyton sought to address in his latest thriller. "This is not a faith-based exorcism movie," the director tells Red Alert. "In this world, priests oftentimes fail at exorcisms. So when they fail, they'll go find an Incarnate. Those people are the badasses that you bring in when you really need to get rid of a demon."

SCI-FI SUPERCEDES FANTASY

2 In crafting the film, Peyton called on his favourite genre for inspiration. "My favourite horror movie is probably *Alien*, and I think it's because I love sci-fi so much," he says. "What's fantastic about horror is that by the nature of it it can cross-genre pollinate so easily... We're doing an exorcism movie that's more technology/science based than faith based. That's a big idea that I have not seen. Initially, it was

pitched to me as *The Exorcist* meets *Inception*. Then I threw in a twist of *Blade Runner*."

REVENGE IS A DRIVING FORCE

3 Remember how angry Aaron Eckhart got when Harvey Dent's girlfriend was killed in *The Dark Knight*? This time, he plays a character who loses his entire family... "He's playing a really messed-up character," says Peyton, "who's lived through some serious trauma. He cares about one thing – avenging [his family's] deaths. But through that process, he starts to protect the people who are also in the line of fire... So there's some pretty intense acting from Mr Eckhart."

ITS PG-13 SHOULDN'T SCARE YOU

4 Peyton knows how much American horror fans hate the dreaded PG-13 rating, so... "I say this with no hyperbole and no smoke-blowing – this is the scariest PG-13 movie I've ever fucking seen," he assures us. "It's such a process to get the rating. Because it was so dark and so tense it was really hard to get out of the R. Yet I was really driven to make a movie that teenagers could see."

AARON ECKHART'S DEMON HUNTER COULD RETURN

5 "Because of the world we set up and the fact that Aaron's title is 'Incarnate'," says Peyton, "you can explore and find other Incarnates or find Aaron in further adventures down the road. It's all about if people want more. But for me it just comes from a natural extension of trying to build out the most interesting three-dimensional world that the characters inhabit. So the answer is yes! We could do lots more." ●

Incarnate will be released in the UK in 2017.

AOC



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AGON

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REGI

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SCI-FACT! Season two introduces the Hunter's Moon, a bar which caters to Mundanes and Downworlders.



TV EXCLUSIVE

THROWING SHADE

Dark days are ahead in *Shadowhunters*' refreshed second season

 **A change of the guard is taking place** over on *Shadowhunters*. Based on the bestselling *Mortal Instruments* novels by Cassandra Clare, the TV series follows college student Clary Fray (Katherine McNamara), who learns she comes from a long line of Shadowhunters – human-angel hybrids sworn to protect mankind from demons and the forces of evil. For the upcoming second season, the keys to the kingdom have been passed to new showrunners Todd Slavkin and Darren Swimmer (*Smallville*, *Defiance*), who took past criticisms and accolades into consideration, and turned to the source material for inspiration on where to go next.

“We felt like the books, and the tone of the books, sometimes got a tad lost in the rush to get through the plot-driven story,” Slavkin explains about the previous season. “The room

“We felt like the tone of the books sometimes got a tad lost”

for character growth and showing the heroes' journeys through the eyes of not just Clary, but Alec (Matthew Daddario) and Jace (Dominic Sherwood) and Simon (Alberto Rosende) – that was totally exciting for us. It felt like the path to go on, as opposed to mission of the week.”

The season one finale culminated with Clary reviving her mother Jocelyn (Maxim Roy) and Jace siding with the malevolent Valentine (Alan Van Sprang). When the show returns, Clary and the Shadowhunters are still reeling from those events.

“In season two, Jace's whereabouts and intentions are unknown, which is even more of an issue with our group of Shadowhunters,” says Swimmer. “Clary is in a place where she needs to redefine what her role is in the Shadowhunters' Institute, as well as what her relationship with her mom is going to be moving forward. Then we have Alec and Magnus (Harry Shum Jr), who kicked off their relationship with a bit of a bang and now have to retrace their steps and find out where they are really headed.”

Clary may be a quick study, but she's still a rookie when it comes to magic. The producers sought to slow her development down and delve into what it truly means to be a Shadowhunter. “We knew there was more to her training that we could mine,” Slavkin offers. “In season two, there's a huge reveal that she has this ability to create runes that people have never seen before. That really motivates her journey of self-discovery.”

Meanwhile, Valentine and his army of Shadowhunters remain the primary threats in this dangerous universe. It's something that not only concerns Clary and her friends, but all of the Shadow World's supernatural factions. “That's a big part of season two,” Swimmer concludes. “Difficult times are

when alliances are tested the most. With the danger of an enemy like

Valentine out there, that's when the stress and the strain of the progress that's happened between all the Downworlder groups comes to a head.”

Shadowhunters season two will air early this year.



SCI-FACT! Duffield previously played young Ghost in *Pathfinder* and Callan in *Warcraft*.



FIVE MINUTES WITH...

BURKELY DUFFIELD

Beyond's lead navigates playing a reluctant, empowered hero...

A MAN OUT OF TIME

➔ "Holden Matthews closes his eyes when he's 13 and wakes up at age 25. You see him find himself in a completely new world. His best friend, brother and family have changed so dramatically over a dozen years. When he goes to give his trust to them again they may, or may not, be the people he should be trusting."

THE PATH AHEAD

➔ "I think *Beyond* is about Holden finding exactly where he belongs and what that means. A big part of our show isn't him just chasing his abilities and saving the world. He's a normal kid and just wants his life back. He figures out where he can fit in with school and life, with friends and family. Who do I connect with and can I just stay there? You see him piece himself back together."

MYSTERY MAN

➔ "You watch the pilot and you have so many questions like Holden does. So whenever there's a time when he can get an answer, he's throwing himself into that. The pace of that really drives the action. You are never bored."

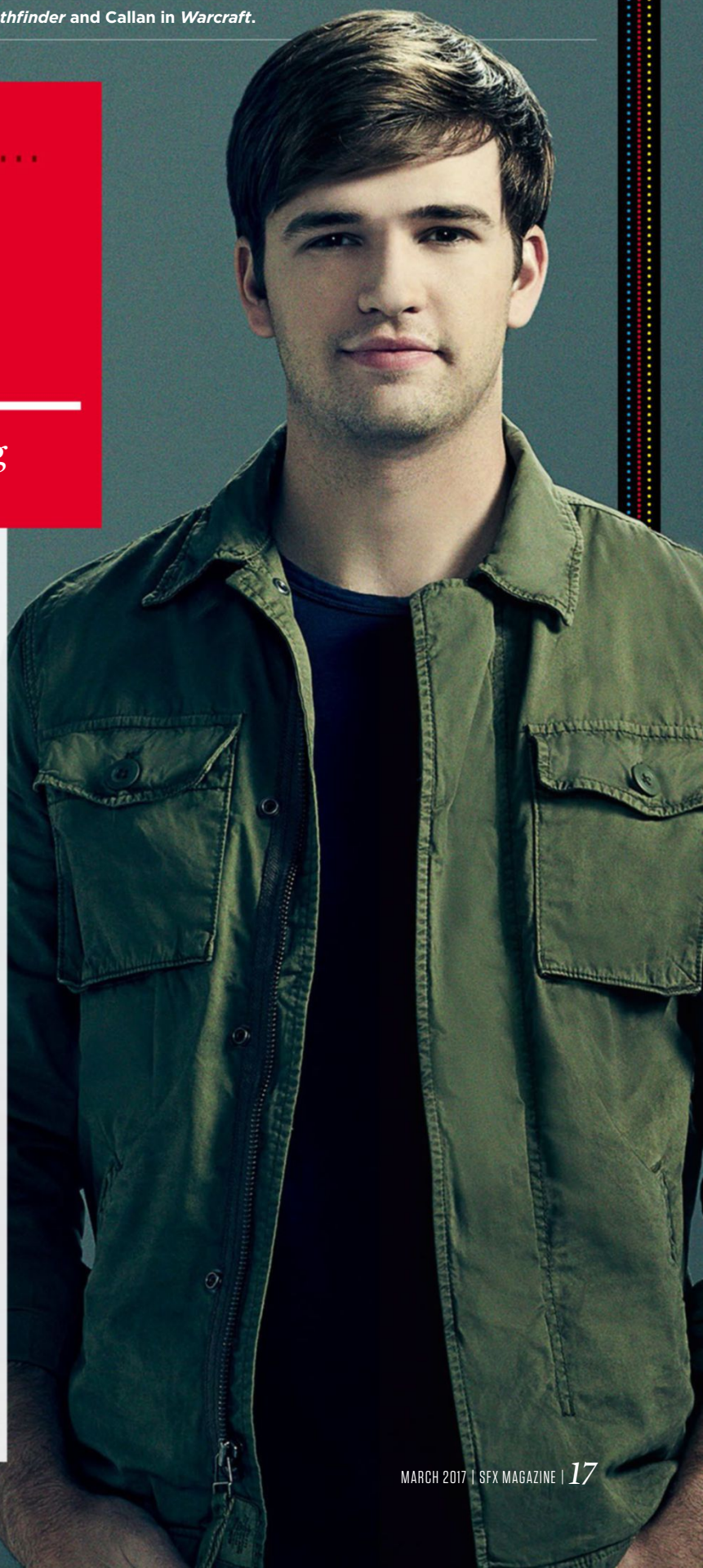
FAMILY TIES

➔ "The Matthews family is closely knit so it's a real dilemma that they lost their son indefinitely. To then have their son reawaken and be fine, puts strain back on the family. We touch on the family bonds and how they grow and change as they grow up."

OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

➔ "There are also new characters, whether they come to give him answers or put him in harm's way. They are attracted by where he's been, his abilities, or what he's going to do with his life from this moment on." ●

Beyond airs on Freeform in the US. A UK air date is TBC.



SCI-FACT! Garcia: "There are tons of details sprinkled throughout for fans. You'll learn a lot more about Mr X!"

Like this, but shorter, and with bad hair and spots.



AERIAL ASSAULT SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

→ **Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency** has been renewed for a second season of sleuthing.

→ Josh Friedman's TV adaptation of **Snowpiercer** has been snapped up by TNT network in the US. No UK channel has been confirmed yet.

→ **iZombie** season three will air in the US from 4 April 2017, and should arrive on Netflix UK shortly after that.

→ Sean Astin has signed on to season two of **Stranger Things**. → DC's **Powerless** will air on NBC in the US from 2 February.

→ John Barrowman has been meeting with the BBC – could he be discussing a new series of **Torchwood**?

→ Peter Capaldi has revealed that he's been told it's his choice if he wants to return for series 11 of **Doctor Who**.

→ **Game Of Thrones** actor Peter Vaughan passed away on 6 December.

→ JJ Abrams will produce space-set series **Glare** for HBO.



AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE

THE TRUTH IS IN HERE

What were Mulder and Scully like as teenagers? Find out in new **X-Files Origins** books...



How did Scully become a sceptic? Was Mulder always a conspiracy theorist? Until now, these were questions nobody could answer. However – with the blessing of *X-Files* creator Chris Carter – authors Kami Garcia and Jonathan Maberry have filled in the blanks in two official novels.

Garcia's *Agent Of Chaos* follows teenage Mulder in 1979 as he finds himself drawn into the mystery of some missing children, while Maberry's *Devil's Advocate* introduces us to young Scully, who looks into a series of killings that seem to have been committed by an angel.

"I was editing *X-Files* anthologies for IDW Publishing and thought that it would be fun to do some stories about Fox Mulder as a teen," Maberry tells Red Alert of the origins of the new books. "I invited my friend Kami Garcia to write a young Mulder story for Volume 2, *The X-Files: The Truth Is Out There*, and she really knocked it out of the park with 'Black Hole Son'. It proved that there was a lot of creative storytelling opportunity. So Kami and I cooked up the idea of a novel series."

Garcia was happy to take part. "I love the idea of looking at a character like Fox Mulder as an adult and reverse-engineering his psyche to figure out what made him the man he became," she says.

It's the same for 15-year-old Scully, too, in *Devil's Advocate*. "In the show it alludes to the fact that Scully used to believe but something happened that shifted her into the sceptic camp," says Maberry. "That's the story I wrote. These books are official backstory. We did our

homework. Everything we did squares with the overall history of *The X-Files*."

But despite the fact that Mulder and Scully never knew each other before the show's first episode, the two characters do almost interact in these pages. "There's one big Easter egg that turned into a crossover: the fictional town of Craiger, Maryland that was used on the show," Garcia explains. "In *Agent Of Chaos*, Mulder visits Craiger [where Scully lives!] during his investigation. And members of the Syndicate make appearances in both books..."

Could this be the start of a whole new franchise of Young Agents stories, then? The authors are hopeful. "There's so much to tell about Dana's journey," says Maberry. Garcia adds, "If fans love these books and support them, we can definitely write more." Watch this space... ●



The X-Files Origins books, published by Atom, are out now.

“DON'T QUOTE ME”

“WE LOVE ANIMATRONICS AND WE'RE TRYING TO DO AS MUCH WITH THEM AS POSSIBLE. I THINK ANIMATRONICS BRING SOUL AND REALITY TO IT.”

JA Bayona is going old school with *Jurassic World 2*.



G.I. JOE

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Red Alert Mar 2017

Freeze Frame

Top trailers dissected

SCI-FACT! Kong will go up against Godzilla in 2020 for super-smackdown, uh, *Kong Vs Godzilla*.

KONG: SKULL ISLAND

He smashes! He screams! He strolls!

OUT
10 MAR
2017



↑ "Bad Moon Rising" plays as a bored-looking Lieutenant Colonel Packard (Samuel L. Jackson) is shown a slideshow of a South Pacific island.



↑ Yep, that'd be Skull Island. It looks scary as heck so, naturally, we're going there with a team of explorers and soldiers.



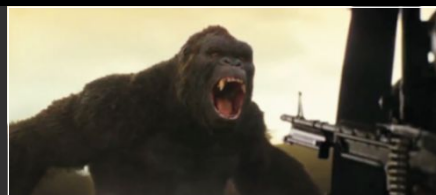
↑ That includes Captain James Conrad (Tom Hiddleston), who thinks that dropping bombs to map the island might not be the greatest idea.



↑ There's also photojournalist Weaver (Brie Larson), who doubles as a peace activist. Looks like she'll be this movie's Ann Darrow.



↑ "Is that a monkey?" Big surprise, something doesn't like being bombed by visitors and sets about swatting helicopters like flies using trees.



↑ That something turns out to be Kong, who rules Skull Island. He shows the soldiers who's boss by smashing their choppers together.



↑ And in one seriously epic shot, he comes face-to-snout with Lieutenant Colonel Packard through a curtain of fire. Talk about badass.



↑ "I'm sorry for your men," Bill Randa (John Goodman) tells Packard. As the leader of the expedition, he's clearly got his own agenda.



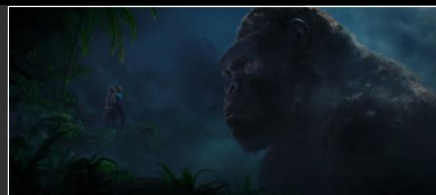
↑ Randa wants to take back "proof that monsters exist", but first the team will have to deal with some not-to-be-messed-with locals.



↑ But who's this? John C. Reilly's apparently chummy with the natives and knows a thing or two about Kong ("He's king around here").



↑ Including the fact that Kong isn't the only giant thing on the island - there are also "devils from below", including humungo arachnids.



↑ But that's okay because it seems Kong's a pal - to Conrad and Weaver at least, who are the only ones we're meant to care about anyway.

The Buzz



RICH I love the '70s setting, the look of Kong and the idea of him joining forces with the humans, though I really hope it doesn't deteriorate into generic monster-on-monster action.



JOSH Peter Jackson's *Kong* was handsome if loooong. *Skull Island* looks snappier and snippier, with loads of monsters. Not sure about John C. Reilly's *Jumanji*-like hippie, though.



RHIAN Quite like to go and see this now! Not completely convinced by the "Skull Crawlers", but apart from that it looks like a good combination of humour and action. Plus Tom Hiddleston!



IAN Feels like a particularly dimwitted *Jurassic Park* sequel, not a Kong movie. Combining Kong with contemporary action and '70s rock feels horribly clashing.

SCI-FACT! *The Walking Dead's* Steven Yeun and *Flight Of The Conchords'* Rhys Darby both supply voices for *Voltron*.

NEW AUTHOR

VIC JAMES

MEET THE
DOCUMENTARY
FILMMAKER BEHIND
GILDED CAGE



Describe the world of *Gilded Cage*...

→ It's set in a contemporary Britain ruled by a magically gifted aristocracy, the Equals. All unskilled people must perform a decade of service, either in grim slavetowns or on one of the glittering Equal estates.

Who are your protagonists?

→ Abi is 18 and the classic big sister; smart and resourceful, but a little too confident in her own abilities. She must navigate a grand estate, while her laid-back brother Luke, who's 17, is forced to grow up fast when separated from his family and sent to a slavetown.

What was the initial inspiration?

→ There's a wall along the A31 that's one of the longest in Britain. It encircles a stately home with grounds so large you can't see the house from the road. We drove along the wall often en route to childhood holidays, and I always used to wonder what it was keeping out – or in. The other major inspiration was a BBC Two series I produced, *The Superrich And Us*. The economics of wealth inequality are staggering; at this moment in history, the power that wealth gives the rich is almost like magic.

The book was originally available online via Wattpad. Is this version different?

→ I used Wattpad as a way of forcing myself to complete a first draft. It's evolved a great deal since then. The same events happen to the same people in the same order, but that's about it!

Gilded Cage is published by Pan on 26 January.



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

VOLTRON LEGACY

The rebooted *Voltron: Legendary Defender* is back for a second season

So young and full of energy, we feel tired just looking at them.

➔ After returning in 2016 from years in deep-space limbo, a certain giant robot is back on our screens this month in a second season of *Voltron: Legendary Defender*. A reboot of the popular '80s cartoon, it's the story of a group of kids who pilot five robot lions, which join together to become the eponymous automaton.

"It somehow resonated with a pretty huge audience," executive producer Lauren Montgomery tells Red Alert. "I think it's partly because there's a pretty cool robot made out of these big awesome lions, but there's the aspect that there isn't one specific hero. They all had to work together to make that thing work."

"It's this weird product of its time," laughs fellow executive producer Joaquim Dos Santos. "It's nutty, but it made such an impression." While the basic premise of the show remains the same, there have been some tweaks to the format: Sven is now Shiro, Pidge is [potential spoiler if you're yet to see season one] now a girl, and some elements of a less enlightened time have been corrected.

"There's scenes where Princess Allura is just kind of thrown over Coran's knee and spanked," says Montgomery. "And a lot of scenes where it's all about the guys wanting to marry Allura.

Times have evolved, so there were things we had to change to fit in with more modern times, and take a little bit of the sexism out."

Like *Battle Of The Planets*, the '80s *Voltron* was lifted from Japanese cartoons, with the stories reworked and redubbed. As well as looking back to the US version they grew up with, the makers of the new *Voltron* also took inspiration from the Japanese source material.

"Not all of [the anime] is appropriate," Dos Santos explains, "but even though some of the themes are still too heavy for us to air on this show, it had a clear, cohesive storyline, and you understood every character's motivations."

The new *Voltron* has another advantage over its predecessor, in that it's not just limited to standalone stories of the week. "Netflix have been saying the more serialisation the better," says Dos Santos. "Binge watching is the thing, they want people to follow the story through and stay for the next one. We've known for a while that we were getting a season two, so we could pepper things in early that we knew could pay off in season two. That's just a luxury we'd not be afforded in network TV at all." ●

Voltron's second season comes to Netflix on 20 January.

SCI-FACT! According to the rumour mill, Olivia (Marie Avgeropoulos) could fall pregnant this season.

TV EXCLUSIVE

HOME SWEET HELL

Clarke (Eliza Taylor) needs hugs. Lots of them.

In *The 100*'s fourth season, things are getting even more dangerous...

➔ “On some level, it’s a Noah’s ark story where Noah knew that the world was going to end, so who is he going to tell?” Jason Rothenberg, exec producer and showrunner of *The 100*, tells Red Alert. “And when the world found out, they wanted the ark for themselves... so we’ll lean into that metaphor a little bit this season.”

He’s not overstating things, either. Unrelenting in its threats, *The 100*’s fourth season brings with it the promise of nuclear radiation, which will make the planet uninhabitable within six months for 100 leader Clarke Griffin (Eliza Taylor), the Grounders and the Arkadia survivors. But will the last remnants of humanity figure out a solution?

“We tested the limits of how far we could stretch the universe”

“Obviously, we set up a big problem this season in the finale,” Rothenberg says. “So right away, they have to deal with it. We also won’t forget anything that happened before. I like to make sure we don’t drop threads as much as possible. We did things last season that are intense and that will follow these characters in their emotional lives forever.”

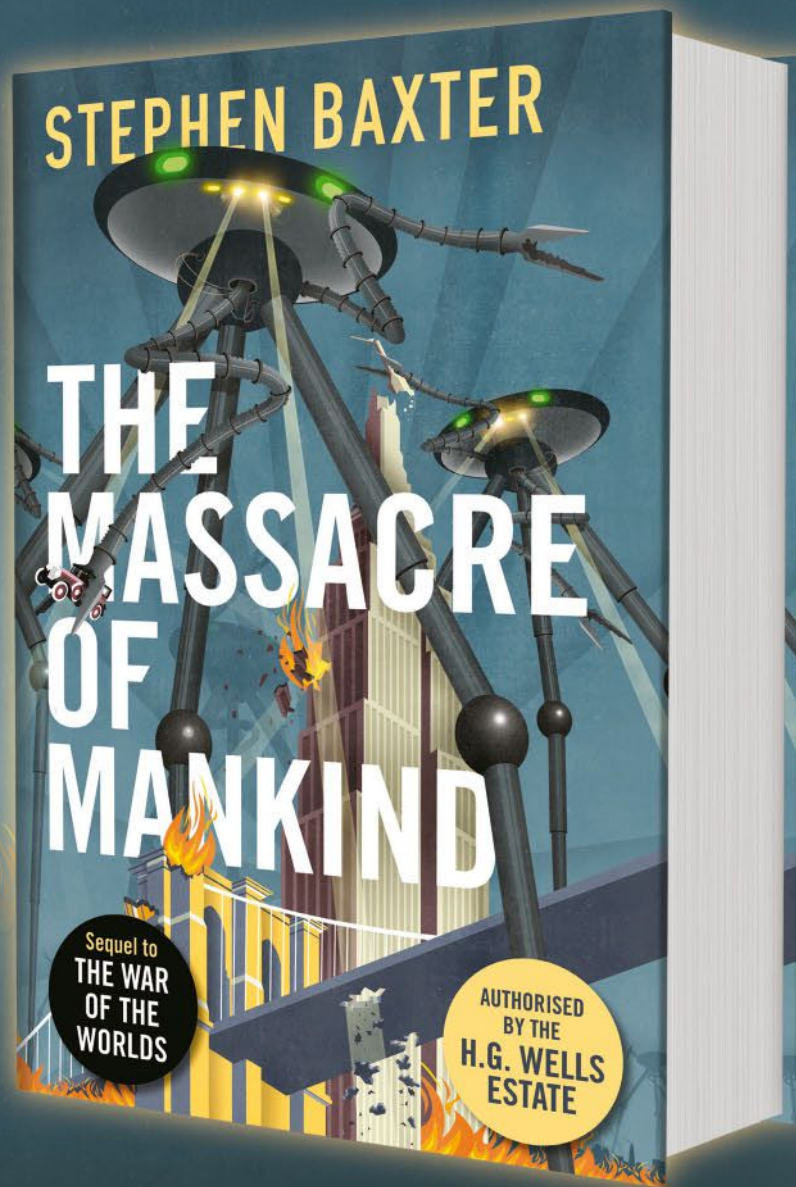
In particular, Clarke lost Lexa (Alycia Debnam-Carey, now in *Fear The Walking Dead*), the Grounder Commander and her lover, in season three, which caused fan uproar. As to whether a new romance could bloom this season for Clarke, Rothenberg says, “She’s had two loves in three seasons and they didn’t end very well. She lost her soul mate in Lexa, so she’s not ready to jump into another relationship. But at the end of the day, Clarke’s an 18-year-old child still, in many ways, so she will move on for

sure. I can say as the person who created the character of Lexa, she would want Clarke to be happy, so she will be with somebody eventually. I won’t say who, when or if it’s a guy or a girl.”

United by their shared goal to fight extinction, Rothenberg says the large cast will make for some interesting pairings this season. “The show is about the delinquents, which is what fans call them and is appropriate,” he laughs. “Last season, we pushed them apart and tested the limits of how far we could stretch the universe and separate people. But the other truth is that with this mission, they can’t just all move in one direction together and handle the problems one at a time. So there is definitely a divide-and-conquer approach to figure out the best way to solve this thing, if there is a solution.”

The 100 returns to US screens on The CW in February. The show airs on E4 in the UK.

THE MARTIANS HAVE RETURNED.



The authorised sequel to
The War of the Worlds has arrived.

Buy it at your local Waterstones
or Waterstones.com



SCI-FACT! Apart from Kate Bishop and Clint Barton, Squadron Supreme's Wyatt MacDonald has also used the name Hawkeye.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Will she appear in a movie for, like, a minute before turning bad?

SUPER GIRL POWER

Hawkeye gets a new string to her bow while **The Unstoppable Wasp** flies solo at Marvel

➔ While their classic incarnations have long been Marvel stalwarts, younger versions of Hawkeye and the Wasp are now set to take centre stage after being given their own monthly titles.

While writer Kelly Thompson first pitched a Kate Bishop Hawkeye book two years ago, the erstwhile Young Avenger is stepping into the spotlight after her predecessor Clint Barton's controversial actions in *Civil War II*. "It just so happened that once we got the green light, Clint was moving to Occupy Avengers," says Thompson. "So we got to inherit the Hawkeye name for Kate, which was super exciting!"

With Thompson noting that "our Hawkeye is one part superhero and one part PI", the first issue sees Kate relocating to Los Angeles. "Her move to the West Coast is driven by needing a break from some of the rough stuff she's been through lately," she says.

Meanwhile, written by Jeremy Whitley and drawn by Elsa Charretier, *The Unstoppable Wasp* focuses on Hank Pym's long-lost daughter Nadia Pym, who with her Red Room background has much in common with Black Widow. "Beyond her being a spunky 16-year-old kid who knows 57 ways to kill you where you stand, she can connect not just with Black Widow but also the Winter Soldier," teases Whitley, who reveals that Nadia is also similar to Hope Pym, the Marvel Cinematic Universe's Wasp. "What we're hoping to do is create a version of what Hope might have been like, were she born into the Marvel Universe as we know it. Nadia is a very different character in a lot of ways, but they have the same brain and ambitious heart." ●

Hawkeye and The Unstoppable Wasp are out now from Marvel Comics.

Your kids will understand what's going on.



SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

TROLL MODELS

Writer and producer **Marc Guggenheim** talks new Netflix series *Trollhunters*

➔ "One of the touchstones for us was the Amblin movies of the '80s," Marc Guggenheim, co-writer and producer of new Netflix show *Trollhunters*, explains. "The first thing that jumped out is how much agency the kids have. Often they are operating without parental supervision and they can handle danger and adventure."

Danger and adventure are certainly in no short supply. Created by the brilliant Guillermo del Toro and adapted from his own children's book, *Trollhunters* is an imaginative animated series telling the story of Jim (voiced by Anton Yelchin), who is chosen to become the first human Trollhunter, protecting a secret society of good trolls from their evil enemies.

Of all the many creatures that inhabit this rich, new world, Guggenheim points to Blinky – Jim's troll mentor voiced by Kelsey Grammer – as a particular favourite: "He embodies to me what this project is all about, which is taking Guillermo's design sensibilities and making them appropriate for all ages."

And just what is it like working with such a creative filmmaker? "You can't have a meeting with Guillermo and not walk away without being educated in some way."

Sadly, *Trollhunters* also marks Anton Yelchin's last role, before he was tragically killed in an accident last year. "Everyone was really struck by, not just Anton's talent, but the depth of his spirit and what a wonderful person he was. To watch him grow into a voice actor and really come to embody Jim was remarkably satisfying." ●

Trollhunters season one is available on Netflix now.

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Red Alert Image Bank *Where pictures are greater than words*

SCI-FACT! An app on the SoftBank smartphone lets you watch *The Force Awakens* on repeat until 2019.



MAN WITH THE IRON...

📺 It's not karate-chopping onto Netflix until March, but the first images from *Iron Fist* have us cracking our knuckles with anticipation. Showing off Finn Jones as Danny Rand/Iron Fist, plus giving us a peek at Marvel TV regular Rosario Dawson as Claire Temple, the shots have suitably whet our appetite for the next standalone Marvel series just begging to be binge-watched. "There's a lot of contradictions to play with," Jones says of his character. Bring 'em.

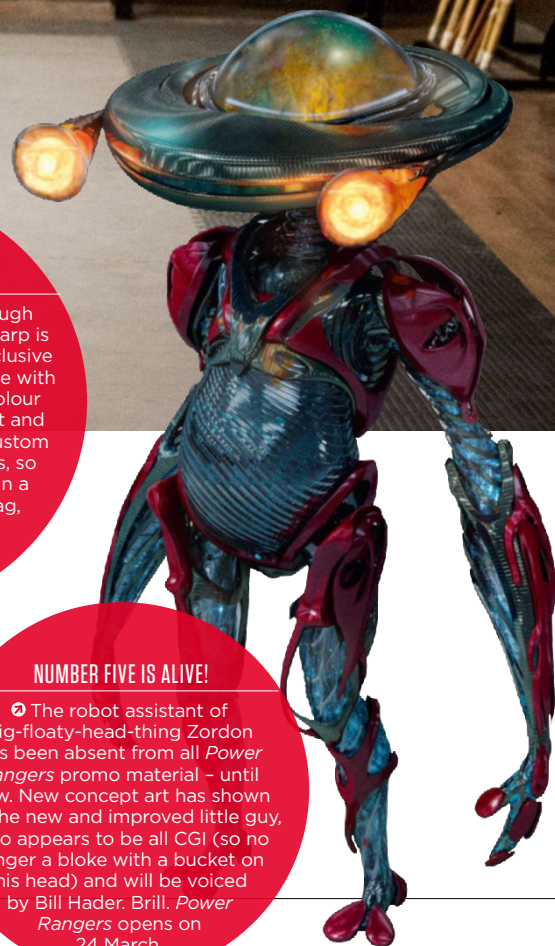
THIS IS THE PHONE YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

📱 Because you don't have enough *Star Wars* in your life already, Sharp is manufacturing this SoftBank-exclusive *Star Wars* smartphone to coincide with the release of *Rogue One*. Its colour scheme alternates between light and dark (naturally), and there are custom emojis, apps, and sound effects, so you can pretend you're living in a galaxy far, far away. Slight snag, though - it's currently only available in Japan. Like all the best things.



NUMBER FIVE IS ALIVE!

🤖 The robot assistant of big-floaty-head-thing Zordon has been absent from all *Power Rangers* promo material - until now. New concept art has shown off the new and improved little guy, who appears to be all CGI (so no longer a bloke with a bucket on his head) and will be voiced by Bill Hader. Brill. *Power Rangers* opens on 24 March.



SCI-FACT! JRR Tolkien originally wrote Gandalf's origin on the back of a postcard of a bearded figure.



NEWS WARP HIGH-SPEED FACTS

→ **Firefly** star **Ron Glass** sadly passed away on 25 November aged 71.
→ **Emperor Snoke** could be portrayed by a puppet in *Star Wars: Episode VIII* according to new rumours.
→ **The Mummy** will reboot the Universal Cinematic Universe – *Dracula Untold* is not being considered “canon”. Can’t think why.
→ DC TV universe supremo Greg Berlanti will helm a remake of **Little Shop Of Horrors**.
→ **Ryan Reynolds** has revealed he wants “Deadpool and Wolverine in a movie together”. He’ll have to drag Hugh Jackman out of retirement post-*Logan* to make that happen.
→ Richard E Grant’s role in **Logan** has been revealed as Dr Zander Rice, who works for the Weapon X facility.
→ **New Mutants** could begin filming in May with director Josh Boone at the helm.
→ **King Arthur** has been pushed to summer 2017.
→ **Transformers** spin-off **Bumblebee** could be R-rated if producer Michael Bay has his way.
→ Marvel and Sony confident about **Spider-Man: Homecoming** – a release date of July 2019 has been set for a sequel.



MAGICAL CUSSES

Curse Words is a fantasy comic you can swear by



Fantasy is a relatively untapped genre in comics, but that is set to change in January with the release of *Inhumans Vs X-Men* scribe Charles Soule's new creator-owned series, *Curse Words*. Drawn by Ryan Browne, the ongoing Image monthly centres around Wizord, a malevolent mage who journeys to New York from another dimension with the intention of conquering the planet, only to be won over by the Big Apple's particular charms.

“*Curse Words* is designed to be its own thing, but of course it's been influenced by all the books and films we've consumed over the years,” Soule tells Red Alert. “The idea is to distill all that down and make something that feels new and familiar at the same time; to use the language and tropes of fantasy, but in our own way.”

Suggesting that the fantastic land from which he hails is “like Middle-earth, but if Sauron had won”, Soule compares the morally conflicted Wizord to *Breaking Bad*'s Walter White. “He's inspired by a lot of

characters such as Gandalf, and even someone like Archer,” he says, referring to the main character in the popular animated spy series. “He's extremely confident, almost in a delusional way, although it's not entirely unwarranted, as he's pretty fantastic at what he does, but pride goeth...”

While Wizord's evil demon boss Sizzajee despatches a host of magical assassins to eliminate him and finish the job he started – including his ex Ruby Stitch and Botchkto the hogtaur; like a centaur but with a hog instead of a horse – Soule believes that *Curse Words*'s breakout character will be a talking koala named Margaret. “She's Wizord's familiar, and is sort of his guide to our world, as she came here five years before he did to scout things out,” explains Soule. “As the series continues, she also becomes something like his conscience. Margaret is fantastic, and I reckon people will end up liking her more than Wizord, Luke Skywalker or even Dumbledore. She's just great!”



Curse Words #1 is published on 18 January by Image Comics.



Nick Setchfield's

DEVELOPMENT HELL

Your monthly glimpse into Hollywood's hoped-for future



THE MAGNIFICENT CORELLIAN!

HAN SOLO

◆ Saddle up your Bantha, pilgrim. Seems the Han Solo movie will put a spurs-jangling spin on everyone's favourite star-smuggler. "This moves closer to a heist or Western type feel," reveals High Priestess of Lucasfilm **Kathleen Kennedy**. The prequel tale will take its visual cues from the work of 19th century painter Frederic Remington,

whose golden, romanticised illustrations did much to enshrine the myth of frontier life. "We talked about Remington and those primary colours that are used in his paintings defining the look and feel of the film," says Kennedy. *Game Of Thrones* star **Emilia Clarke** is the latest addition to the cast, joining **Donald Glover** as a young Lando Calrissian and **Alden Ehrenreich** reminding you

to never tell him the odds in the title role. *The Lego Movie*'s **Phil Lord** and **Christopher Miller** co-direct and the movie swaggers through the space saloon doors 25 May 2018.

LIVING DOLL!

BARBIE

◆ *Trainwreck*'s **Amy Schumer** is the star of the Barbie movie. And

the live-action version of Mattel's poseable plastic clothes horse comes accessorised with a high-concept, stereotype-busting twist. Schumer will play a misfit living in a land of Stepford-perfect Barbies who finds herself transported to our world, where the fact she's different from the perma-smiling, immaculately-coiffed norm becomes an unexpected asset. The



Illustration by Paul Cennick

screenplay's by *Community's* **Hilary Winston** but Schumer and sister **Kim Caramela** are expected to rewrite it. Pitched as a feelgood comedy-fantasy in the *Splash/Big* tradition, it's the second collaboration between Mattel and Sony Pictures, who are also developing a reboot of *Masters Of The Universe*. We're already sensing crossover potential: *Castle Pinksull*, anyone?

SPICE UP YOUR LIFE!

DUNE

🔥 **Frank Herbert's** sand-swept, worm-infested brick of a book is screenbound again. Originally brought to the screen by David Lynch in 1984 – the sight of Sting in his winged undercrackers is seared upon the minds of a generation – and then turned into a TV miniseries in 2000, it's the epic tale of Paul Atreides, scion of the noble house of the desert planet Arrakis. This world is the only source of the "spice" Melange, a drug that's the most coveted substance in the universe. The rights to Herbert's tale – a key influence on a young fella named George Lucas – have been acquired by Lionsgate Entertainment, home of the *Hunger Games* franchise. They're looking to turn the *Dune* saga into a global multimedia franchise, developing movies and potential TV projects. Possibly even a cartoon spin-off about Sting's flying keks.

WE THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD...

ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

🔥 Reset that oversized digital watch. Turns out the *Escape From New York* remake isn't a remake at all – it's a prequel. With a screenplay by *Luther* creator **Neil Cross**, the new movie will apparently show us a New York very different to the scuzzy, maximum security clink of John Carpenter's original. It's a drone-patrolled, AI-controlled utopia, in fact. In a cunning inversion, the refugee-crammed world outside isn't quite so desirable... This time Snake Plissken must infiltrate the city



ALSO BURNING

→ **Nicolas Cage** signs on for global warming thriller *The Humanity Bureau*...

Justice Smith joining *Jurassic World 2*...

Chad Stahelski directing *Highlander* reboot for Lionsgate...

How To Train Your Dragon 3 delayed till 1 March 2019... *Goosebumps*

Rob Letterman directing *Detective Pikachu* for Legendary Entertainment...

Dean Devlin confirms *Stargate* remake has stalled... *Aquaman* rescheduled for 5 October 2018...

Tom Holland and **Daisy Ridley** orbiting the adap of **Patrick Ness's** YA novel *Chaos Walking*... **Ivan Reitman** says more *Ghostbusters* movies in development...

Peter Jackson's adaptation of *Mortal Engines* set for release 14 December 2018... *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* pushed back to 6 October 2017...

Angela Bassett playing T'Challa's mother in *Marvel's Black Panther*...

David Leitch confirmed as *Deadpool 2* helmer... **Simon McQuoid** in talks to direct *New Line's Mortal Kombat* reboot...

Willem Dafoe confirmed as a cameo in *Justice League* ahead of his *Aquaman* appearance...

Walton Goggins is the villain in *Tomb Raider*...



“I’m not going for the same crowd that Marvel and DC are going for”

and return with the villain of the piece, the shady playboy heir to a biotech corporation. Young Snake has only 11 hours to complete his mission – halving the 22-hour countdown of the '81 movie – and an imminent superstorm to contend with... Carpenter bags an executive producer credit on this one.

ROCK AND LOAD!

RAMPAGE

🔥 All praise the secret Hollywood cloning project that's ensured **Dwayne Johnson** will star in every last film you'll ever see. How else would The Artist Formerly Known As The Rock find time to add *Rampage* to a schedule already bulging like a set of rippling bronzed pecs in a hurricane-whipped shirt? Adapting the classic '80s arcade game that pitted the military against giant, mutated, city-trashing animals – a gorilla! A dinosaur! A werewolf! – it's set to be directed by **Brad Peyton**, the man behind Blumhouse horror *Incarnate* (see p14). “We are using our love of the original game as our inspiration,” he tells *We Got This Covered*. “Then we're going to build a movie, like *San Andreas*, that is really going to surprise people in what it delivers. It's going to be a lot more emotional, a lot scarier and a lot more real than you'd expect.” Production begins this March, targeting a 20 April 2018 release.

SPAWNY GET!

SPAWN

🔥 **Todd McFarlane** – the man who unleashed comic book antihero Spawn – wants to bring

his none-more-'90s super-demon back to the big screen. But don't expect the blockbuster budget treatment: Todd intends to direct it itself, and he knows that first time helmers don't get to play with the big bucks. “It's not good business to spend \$80 million on a movie and then give it to somebody who's not known for directing movies,” McFarlane – not known for directing movies – tells *Comicbook.com*. “So I knew I needed to keep the story and the budget both tight so that when I go to Hollywood and say ‘I have to direct it’, that's not even a negotiation.” He aims to bring it in for \$10 million – a quarter of the money spent on *Spawn's* movie debut in 1997 – and wants to play up the character's hellish edge. “I'm not going for the same crowd that Marvel and DC are going for; I'm going for the same crowd that horror film releases are going for. People who want to take their boyfriend or girlfriend or go out with the girls and go to the movies and get spooked.”

PREQUEL IN DISGUISE!

TRANSFORMERS – CYBERTRON

🔥 Humanity's subjugation by the *Transformers* franchise continues apace. Not only do outlines exist for *Transformers 5* and 6 – with a separate *Bumblebee* spin-off currently being written by *Shut In's* **Christina Hodson** – but an animated movie set on the Autobot homeworld of Cybertron is also looming on the horizon like a big, clanking metal dude. “It's in continuity with the mythology,” says producer **Lorenzo di Bonaventura**, acknowledging that it's not officially a prequel to the live-action movies. “It's touching on relatively the same time period. We're not trying to affect the animated movie, and the animated movie is not trying to mimic or take from [the live-action films]. It's just we're taking from the same general area.” Di Bonaventura hints that while the movie will be set on Cybertron there'll be a link to our fair planet. “To keep it relatable, you need an Earth relationship to it. It's not necessary, but I think we like it.” ●

//// SFX HAILING FREQUENCIES OPEN! ////

First Contact



THIS MONTH'S COMMUNICATIONS MONITOR

**RUSSELL LEWIN,
PRODUCTION EDITOR**



Presidents come and go, evil dictators croak and the Italian

banking system stumbles from crisis to crisis, but you guys thankfully keep writing into us about the subjects that *really* matter, like the latest JK Rowling moneymaker and a plea for the name of that TV series you half-remember from the '90s. No seriously, we mean it! The arts are vital to keep us going in a difficult life. Empathy is spread, lessons are learned. So send us your thoughts to our regular contact points and you're making a valuable contribution to world sanity.

^{SFX} Hot Topic *Your views on the month's big issue*

#FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

➦ **FILMTHEBLANKS, Twitter** Muffled mumblings and how to hear them. An unlikeable wet lettuce chases Pokémon and fights a cloud of CGI. Yawnius maximo.

➦ **jifan1, GamesRadar+** Took way too long to set up the story. I loved the HP stories/movies and I was forcing myself to stay awake until three-quarters into the film where all of the action starts. There wasn't anything exciting about the wizarding world within this story. I trust that it will improve with the next film.

➦ **SiMan1983, online** I hope that the upcoming sequels follow an underlying story thread (eg, about Grindelwald) but show it from the perspective of other characters. I don't think

we really need to stick with Redmayne's Newt as a protagonist for five films. Yes, there were some things that were left unanswered (Newt's relationship with Dumbledore, Newt's "War Hero" brother...) but he didn't seem interesting enough to explore over a full franchise. Give us new characters each time, but keep the main story intertwining in the background.

➦ **RFLong, Twitter** Enjoyed the depiction of an adult magical world, the way spells used by those experienced in combat etc.

➦ **Ann Bains, email** Oh boy, are they really going to make *five* of these films in total?!

➦ **OliverRFitz, Twitter** Might not capture the magic of original *Potter* films, and the plot doesn't flow perfectly, but still enjoyable due to the setting and Eddie Redmayne.

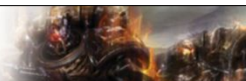
➦ **Michelle Birkby, GR+** Loved it. Awestruck by the creatures, it had nicely complex characters, and that streak of twisted darkness that was in all the best *Harry Potter* movies. Looking forward to the next one.

➦ **Purple Sword, online** Wank.

SFX Is that an adjective or an instruction?



Will Newt be hopping back for another four films?



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“ Might not capture the magic of the original *Potter* films, but still enjoyable ”

👉 **Dan McGeough, GR+** My new favourite film and I thought it had all the best bits of the last eight *Potter* films into one film and the creatures were adorable.

👉 **Edgar Torné, GR+** Entertaining but a bit poor, plotwise. I think Redmayne is a highly overrated actor. I didn't expect to see that character at the end.

SFX *I wish we hadn't.*

👉 **Charlie Keen, email** I actually found it really annoying that Eddie Redmayne never looked anyone in the eye.

SFX *Ah, but he did! Just not all the time.*

👉 **Barbara Rowley, GR+** Thoroughly enjoyed it. Loved catching all the little references – “more of a chaser” etc – and thought it well cast. The creatures were just beautiful. I want a Niffler!

👉 **Cat MacDougall, GR+** It was beautiful, moving, and a lesson in tolerance and humanity. Loved it!

👉 **Gaia Ametza, GR+** Pure escapism and though not stunning (beyond the CGI) a most enjoyable way to spend a few hours.

SFX *Funnily enough, at the cinema I work part-time at I've never heard so many negative comments about a major film from customers for quite a while.*

👉 **Graham Dicker, GR+** CGI fest of boring crapness.

👉 **Robin Burkin, GR+** It was beautiful and amazing.

👉 **Gold Bottle Opener, GR+** It was very dull and way too long.

👉 **Martin Horne, Washington** Excellent extension of the original story. Didn't realise how much we'd all missed the *Potter* universe. Well done JKR, now let's have more.

SFX *I'm not a Potterhead so feel free to ignore the following, but to me the pacing seemed a bit off, the story quite weak and there was an overload of CGI.*

Look out for the next SFX Hot Topic at bit.ly/SFXhottopic



On the way to an alien tryst in the moody *Arrival*.

#VISITING HOURS

👉 **Kiki Rodgers, GR+** Even though I thought *Arrival* was a beautiful, breathtaking film, I had a few problems with it. SPOILER ALERT! By the end of the film, Louise can understand the alien language, unlocking visions of the future. Present and future become one. In a conventional twist, General Chang tells her future self what to do so that her present self can stop him attacking the aliens.

Does this mean the future is fixed, and that Louise has no free will? If the future isn't fixed, couldn't she theoretically do something that would alter the future, and that would then alter the past? I can't get my head around it. Louise asks Ian if he would change his life if he could see all of it, but she doesn't decide to change anything. Despite knowing her daughter is going to suffer and die at a young age, she still decides to have her. Wouldn't the ending have been more powerful if she'd decided not to have her daughter? As it is, she seems helpless to change anything.

Also, I'm not sure if the human mind could handle seeing the future – even though it's been supposedly recalibrated by understanding this new language (which again seems too simplistic).

Colour me confused.

SFX *Yes, that confused me too. Any readers have any theories?*

👉 **Sam Samuels, email** *Arrival* is about as far removed from the original alien invasion movies of the '50s as could be. It certainly surprised me – it's more like a low budget art film than an expensive blockbuster. And at times I felt like I was having to take on as much hard work as the lead characters! I found it very dour, but it does create a dense, moody atmosphere and has some novel ideas about alien intelligence.

SFX *I found it thought-provoking but not massively entertaining. And Jeremy Renner might as well not have been in it.*

#FORWARD TO GLORY

👉 **Neil Ford, email** These are the three movies I am looking forward to in the coming year:

1) *Wonder Woman* – Obviously the trailers look amazing. Gadot looks great in the part, the WWI setting is intriguing and looks to have been done convincingly, plus Etta Candy looks like she might steal the movie. Could this be the first really good female superhero movie? But, to undercut the hype, there are two concerns: can Gal Gadot carry a movie (there have been comments on her →



You can get mucky when exposing *Resident Evil*.

“Reasons to be hopeful: Jovovich kicks arse”

place of *Buffy*'s Mayor Wilkins) but the characters don't have the same variety.

Maybe these shows should stop trying to be the British version of a successful American show and celebrate their own unique identities in order to flourish.

SFX *Yep, and be better, generally (especially Class).*

#HEAVENLY COMEDY

Phil Eggers, email As I sat reading *SFX* 281 I was wondering if you would be covering the excellent new sitcom *The Good Place* when I happened upon Mike Garner's email on page 34. Far from being the entire UK audience, there's at least two of us. As for how we're watching an NBC show from England? That's the magic of Ted Danson.

SFX *Ted Danson is magic, you're right. That hair! But yes, we interviewed Kristen Bell in SFX 280, and hope to revisit the show in a future Viewscreen...*

#NOVEL APPROACH

Pradeep Batura, New Delhi, India Why is it that only the first book in a trilogy or a series is reviewed? Over the last two years, the only exceptions your magazine made were for *Fool's Quest* by Robin Hobb and *A Night Without Stars* by Peter F Hamilton – both the second novels in their series.

We are always more curious to know how a second or third book has come out after the wonderful entry that was the first novel, rather than reading reviews of bad novels which get 2 or 2 1/2 stars.

I strongly urge you to rethink your policy and begin to review the subsequent books of trilogies or series.

SFX *Reviews Ed Ian writes: It does happen a little more often than that, actually – but generally that is the policy. Thing is, reviews of book two generally come out*

monotone line delivery), and, after the shambolic theatrical releases of *BvS* and *Suicide Squad*, have the WB execs FINALLY learned to stay away from the editing room?

2) *Ghost In The Shell* – Despite some shrieking you may have heard, whitewashing is not really an issue here. In-world: the main character has a prosthetic body, and no less a person than the creator of the original manga said she prefers a European style. Real world: for a Hollywood science fiction blockbuster that's hoping to make money, Johansson is not only an obvious choice, she is the best choice. I am excited to see a Western interpretation of GITS, and to see that fascinating world brought to reality. My real concern is the script. Will this be yet another bland, forgettable actioner, or will it live up to its potential?

3) *Resident Evil 6* – Reasons to be hopeful: Milla Jovovich kicks arse. Director Paul WS Anderson gets a bad rap, but he is a real genre fan who makes fun films. This movie also has the virtue of being a known quantity from a reliable team, whereas the above titles excite great hope but might also lead to great disappointment.

The fact that these movies all have female leads is coincidence!

And what is this “stars war” people keep talking about? **SFX** *No idea.*

#NAME THAT SHOW

Amanda, email I am trying to find out the name of a children's TV show from the late '90s I think. It was about three friends who travel to a magical world and bring back three objects. I remember one was a chalice. Once they returned to our world the objects turned into everyday items. The chalice turned into a tin cup and they had to hide the items in the loft as somebody was after them. I remember watching it when it was on and again when it was repeated but I have no memory of the title. I really hope this show was real and not something I dreamt up. Could you please help me as you can see it's keeping me up at night.

SFX *Come on readers, you helped Medium Atomic Weight out with his bunny movie puzzle recently, how about this one?*

#BUFFY 2016 STYLE

Keith Tudor, Romsey Recently we've had two shows advertise themselves as the British *Buffy* – *Class* and *Crazyhead*. It is surely a testament to the success of *Buffy* (a show which ended in May 2003, a good 13 and a half years ago) that



both shows would choose to promote themselves in this way. I would argue that neither qualify as such, as the characters in each new show aren't as well-developed as they were in *Buffy* (which had more episodes per season to flesh out characterisation), however it is good to have some new home-grown genre shows. *Crazyhead* feels more like a British version of *Supernatural* than *Buffy*, as it centres on two characters battling demonically-possessed people, with Tony Curran as Callum, coming across as this show's Crowley in charge of the demonic hoard. *Class*, however, appears to have borrowed heavily from *Buffy*, with its own version of the Hellmouth, and with some in the faculty of Coal Hill aware of the rift and those fighting the creatures emerging from it (in this case a mysterious Governess in

reading very similar to reviews of book one. I also don't see it as a choice between reviewing ongoing series and "bad novels", but between covering series people have probably already made their minds up about and new series they might not otherwise find out about. But I'd be interested to know what other readers think!

#WAN TOO MANY

Bobby Avila, Facebook Why might Obi-Wan Kenobi feature in *Star Wars: Episode VIII*? *Star Wars* is going to be done in by bringing the dead back. How many *Star Wars* movies have been done about the Death Star? Darth Vader is coming back in the next movie with another Death Star. For these movies to go on the story has to move on. I hope Disney doesn't screw up the *Star Wars* craze. When it comes to Disney may the Force be strong with *Star Wars*. **SFX** But it'd be good if they got *Jeremy Corbyn* to play *Obi-Wan*.

#WE ALSO HEARD FROM

Tommy McMunige, email Every other magazine seems to have its own dedicated website. Guess what *SFX* does not. Why? This is a sad state of affairs.

SFX Ooh, that's an unusual surname! Anyway, while there isn't an *SFX* site by name, there is a load of sci-fi content over on *GamesRadar+*, so hopefully you do find some stuff you like.

Curtis Johnston, Twitter We need more shows on TV with spaceships. More spaceships the better. With real science not just fantasy bounty hunter stuff.

SFX Rumour has it there's a new *Star Trek* show this year. That might have some in.

Sarah K, email Sad to see *Firefly's* Ron Glass has died. The flock has lost their Shepherd.

Retro Russ, email Do you guys watch Talking Pictures TV? Loads of obscure genre pictures every week! Recommend it heartily.

SFX Yep, love it. Multi-channel TV rocks, and I remember the doomsayers in the '80s moaning it was a terrible thing.

Clown Prince, email Am I the only *SFX* reader not that bothered about *Rogue One*?

SFX You are, yes. Officially.



Your sci-fi memorabilia valued by the experts from auctioneers Vectis

→ Barry from Newcastle upon Tyne says: "In the '70s my dad used to work for the local newspaper, the *Evening Chronicle*. Every night they'd publish one of those great *Amazing Spider-Man* strips. And then suddenly, the horror, they stopped! I asked my dad to find out why. He said it was just an editorial decision, but they did have a complete set of the strip that was set to go in future editions, and he managed to get it for me. It's not original art of course but I was well chuffed. So now I'm just wondering: does it have any worth at all?"



KATHY TAYLOR OF VECTIS SAYS:

The images show *Amazing Spider-Man* line-art prints (taken from original art) by Stan Lee and John Romita. As they were never published within the newspaper as intended I would imagine a collector would love them (although I would think these strips have been printed elsewhere). It is difficult to place a value on them as there is no precedent set.

If you've got a piece of memorabilia you'd like us to feature, send us a photo of your item with a few words about what it means to you, to sfx@futurenet.com, using the subject line Cash In The AT-AT.

SFX

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A whole decade on *SFX*, Bath's Great Shed Invasion 2016, too many trips to the loft, never having to wait more than a year for a new *Star Wars* movie, eating a sausage for the first time in years, steam on the rooftop pool, illness

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"Is that soap?"

GAME OF THRONES Season 7

Winter has come! Here's what you want in our penultimate trip to the Seven Kingdoms

Illustration by Paul Garner

Wishlist

WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE IN UPCOMING MOVIES AND TV

YOUR TOP 5 REQUESTS

HEY, HBO! SFX READERS HAVE SENT OUT THE RAVENS... PAY ATTENTION OR WE'LL UNLEASH THE HOUND!

WORST THINGS HAPPEN AT SEA

1 With Daenerys en route to King's Landing with Yara and Theon Greyjoy, you're hoping for the mother of all skirmishes in season seven. "A sea battle between the fleets of Euron and Daenerys, off the coast of Westeros, with lots of dragon fire," says **Kate Leatherbarrow**. "Preferably with Cersei watching from Kings Landing, looking scared."

WHITE WALKERS V DRAGONS!

2 Speaking of Cersei... "They should kick Cersei's ass and lead the armies of the South, the Dothraki and the North against the White Walkers," reckons **Neil Hickman**. "Ice zombie army invades from the North, Daenerys and dragons arrive for a huge battle and almost everyone dies!" adds **Jonathan Harvey**, seemingly forgetting that there'll be another six episodes to go when season seven is done...

GET FLASHBACK

3 Season six embraced the flashback, and you clearly want the show to keep

delving into the past. "More flashbacks are definitely welcome," says **Tomas Becks**. "It's always good to see the past of Westeros and what really happened as opposed to what people say has happened."

WHERE THE STONEHEART IS

4 This is one that just won't go away... In the books [potential spoiler!], Catelyn Stark is reanimated as the vengeance-seeking Lady Stoneheart. Ever since the Red Wedding, fans have been clamouring to see her reaping carnage. "Get Michelle Fairley back, give her some *Walking Dead* zombie make-up and I'll be happy," says **James Thompson**.

BY GEORGE

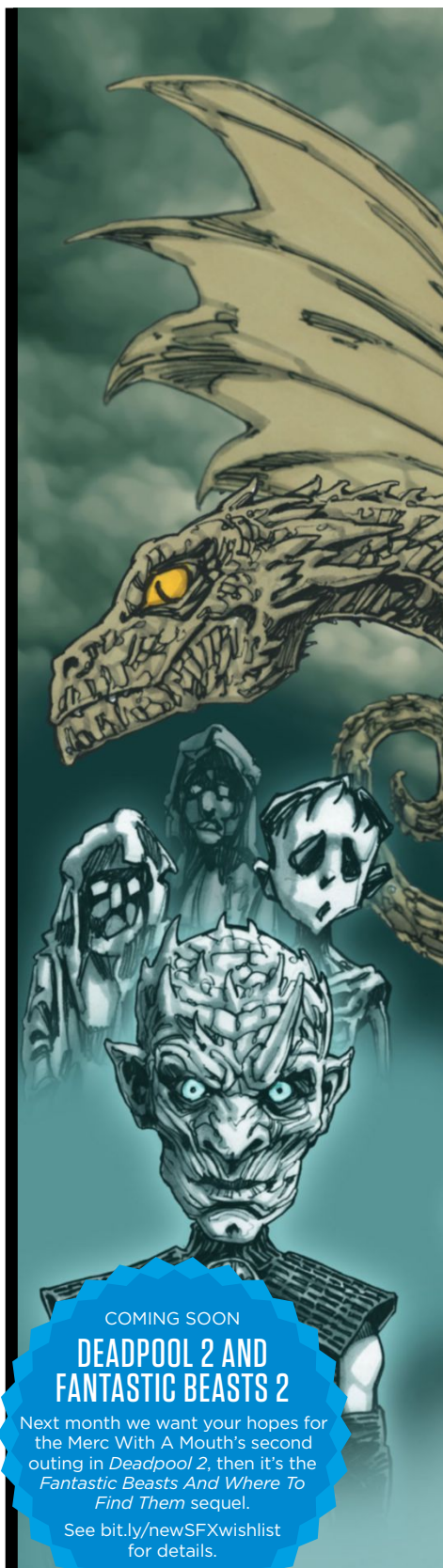
5 Okay, it's not strictly about the TV series, but aside from more nudity [Yawn - Ed], the most overwhelming request was for George RR Martin's next *A Song Of Ice And Fire* novel to finally land in bookshops. "I'd like to see *The Winds Of Winter* before the next season, lol," says **Phil Desira**.

And that's not all they want...

→ **Niamh Kelly** The new effin' book!
→ **Martin Fletcher** I want to see what Gendry's been doing all this time. He must surely be out there somewhere!
→ **Neil Hickman** Do something about that sod Littlefinger, though I can see him pulling a Karma Houdini and getting away with starting a lot of the trouble.
→ **Gavin Dickinson** A fight between someone and a dragon, Saint George style.
→ **Tomas Becks** I hope we still get some surprises and a family reunion when Arya finally gets to Winterfell.
→ **Ricky Morris** I think the season should end with Jon Snow taking King's Landing from the North,

Daenerys taking it from the sea, and Cersei getting her long-awaited comeuppance. That'll leave six season eight episodes to get rid of the White Walkers - easy!
→ **Ana** We wanna see Daenerys kicking ass and taking names. And to see the Hound destroying the Mountain.
→ **Jason Castle** Tyrion sitting on the Iron Throne!
→ **Tracy Latham** For Jon Snow to wake up and realise it was all a dream.
→ **Stephen Cornish** Less dragons. Less Dany. But that's sadly unlikely.
→ **Louise Bennett** I want to see some love and happiness this year! Let's see Daenerys and Yara, and Brienne and Tormund getting

together - and then some weddings that aren't red!
→ **Alice Yates** For the two final seasons to be 12A. [There wouldn't be much left - Ed]
→ **B_Ingran** I don't want to see a Jon Snow and Dany love team. [What do you think this is? *Star Wars*? - Ed]
→ **Ed Gallagher** I would like to see an episode performed in the style of modern interpretive dance or possibly mime.
→ **Wayne Cowie** As a final stab from beyond the grave, Cersei installs a whoopee cushion in the Iron Throne, forever ruining Dany's ascension as queen, and adding Daenerys the Windy to the history books.



COMING SOON DEADPOOL 2 AND FANTASTIC BEASTS 2

Next month we want your hopes for the Merc With A Mouth's second outing in *Deadpool 2*, then it's the *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* sequel.

See bit.ly/newSFXwishlist for details.

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First Contact Mar 2017

YOUR DREAM CAST

JON SNOW

Kit Harington

**TYRION
LANNISTER**

Peter Dinklage

**DAENERYS
TARGARYEN**

Emilia Clarke

**LADY
STONEHEART**

Michelle Fairley

QUEEN CERSEI

Lena Headey





Penny Dreadful

SFX's high priestess of horror

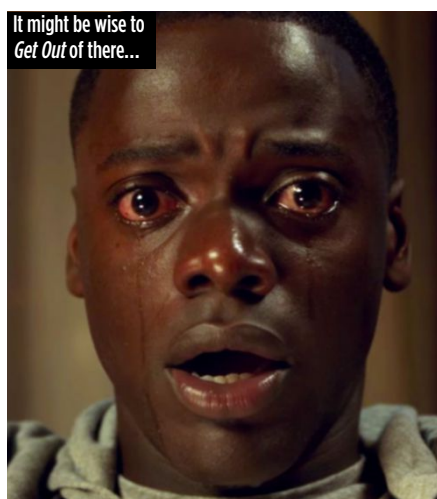
HAPPY NEW FEAR!

➔ The horrors of 2016 are finally over – let's think positive and look to the year ahead. Here are five films to look forward to in 2017: 1) **The Bye Bye Man** Okay, horrible title but this could be interesting. It's based on a (supposedly) true story about an entity which possesses people, causing them to carry out killing sprees. Stacy Title, who made Cameron Diaz black comedy *The Last Supper*, is steering the ship. 2) **Get Out** Brill-looking Blumhouse race-issue horror satire directed by Jordan Peele, from TV comedy *Key And Peele*. Daniel Kaluuya plays an African-American bloke visiting his white girlfriend's family, where he learns lots of black people have mysteriously disappeared. 3) **Flatliners** Reboot of an '90s classic about med students who experiment with death that I'm not upset about because it's directed by *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*'s Niels Arden Oplev. 4) **A Cure For Wellness** Gorgeous looking psycho-horror directed by Gore Verbinski about a freaky "wellness centre" in the Swiss Alps – stars Dane DeHaan and Mia Goth. 5) **God Particle** Aka *Cloverfield 3*. Sneaky sneak JJ Abrams announced in October that this space station-set chiller would be the threequel. Because he's a movie ninja we know sod all about it but I'm betting it'll be good.

I WANT MY MUMMY

➔ The trailer has landed for Alex Kurtzman's reboot of **The Mummy**, and shhh... it actually looks quite good. First of all, the mummy herself (Sofia Boutella) has some seriously creepy J-horror girl-ghost going on. Then Russell Crowe, who plays Dr Jekyll, has said the film will "scare the shit out of you". And then, in the trailer, we actually see Tom Cruise screaming. The Cruiser! Screaming! If Tom's scared, after all he's been through, there's got to be something to worry about. This is the first of the rebooted Universal Monsters expanded universe and they're promising more horror, hopefully in a change from the cheesy and increasingly terrible most recent Mummies. I'm not actually a mad fan of the original monster movies so the reboot doesn't bother me one bit. "What separates a monster movie from a horror movie or a slasher movie is the ability to

New Year blues? Don't worry, 2017 will be all about Mummies and adult babies...



Will the *Flatliners* remake live up to the original?

The *Mummy* should probably go to Specsavers.



fear the monster and fear for the monster," says Kurtzman. Reassuring.

MURDER MOST HORRID

➔ My new obsession is a slight digression from horror but don't worry, it still involves killing! **My Favourite Murder** is a podcast hosted by lovely valley girls Georgia Hardstark and Karen Kilgariff, who each week discuss a real-life homicide – it's horrific and brilliant and episode 18 is going to blow your mind. It tells the story of 15-year-old Mary Vincent, who was hitchhiking in Las Vegas when a guy called Lawrence Singleton picked her up. He raped her, CUT OFF BOTH HER ARMS and threw her down a ravine. And miraculously, she survived. Gruesome, but it's an incredible story begging to be made into a movie. The story doesn't end there either – listen to the show for more. Someone get Jason Blum on the blower, I reckon there's an Oscar in this one.

BABY LOVE

➔ Weirdest thing coming your way in 2017: **Attack Of The Adult Babies**. And bizarrely it actually might be good. This is the latest from *Before Dawn* and *Bait* director (and *Emmerdale* star) Dominic Brunt, with his wife, actress Joanne Mitchell, producing. Brunt describes it as "a very British satirical slapstick horror" which will delve into the underworld of grown-ups who like to dress in nappies and suck dummies. It stars Andrew Dunn, who used to be Roger Stiles in *Corrie*. You can't get weirder than that. ●

Dreadful old movie

➔ Artsy French zombie movie *The Grapes Of Death* (1978) is getting a DVD rerelease from Redemption Films on 23 January. It's from "dark-fantastique", and sometime porn, director Jean Rollins, and features a young woman trapped in a village where an infected vineyard has turned the residents into ferocious killers. Intoxicating.

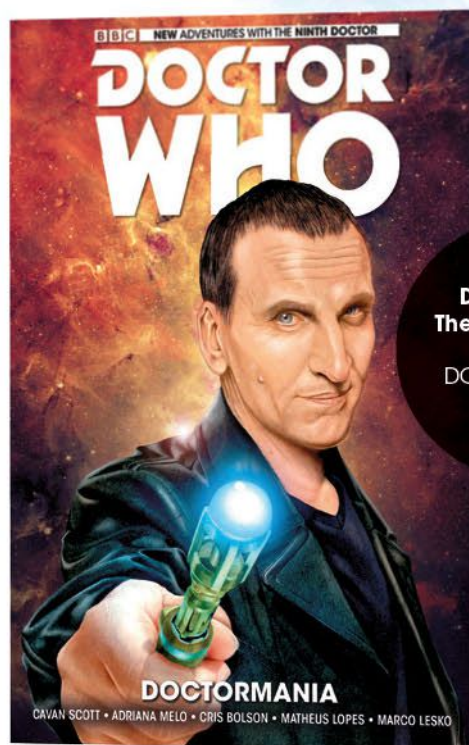


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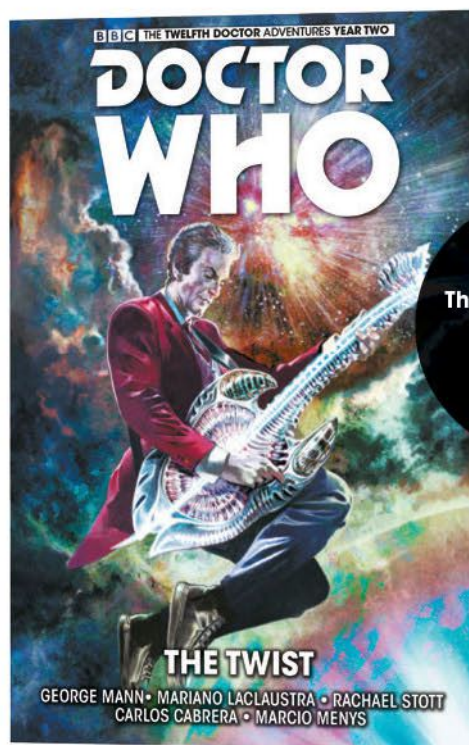
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LIFE ON MARS

Author **Greg Bear** celebrates the Red Planet



Nasa's Curiosity Rover has been on Mars for more than four years!

NASA/JPL-CALTECH/MSS

“I HAVE THE STRANGE FEELING THAT I KNOW MARS, THAT I’VE LIVED THERE”

Over the last 40 years, I’ve spent a fair amount of time on Mars – first with my short story, “A Martian Ricorso”, published in *Analog* in February 1976; next with *Moving Mars* published in 1993, and finally with a return to Mars for the *War Dogs* trilogy.

Throughout these visits, I’ve loved keeping up with the very hard work being done by engineers and scientists, exploring Mars remotely, trying to understand its character and riddle its mysteries. My first visit began before the launch of the Viking 1 and 2 orbiter/lander combinations. Thereafter, I was constantly tracking the science and thinking my own thoughts about the first puzzling and then disappointing soil tests conducted by those landers. I made constant reference to Nasa/JPL volumes on Mars exploration, and to the scholarly and brilliant examinations of Mars by Thomas Mutch.

My most recent visits to the Red Planet have been supplemented by Google Mars online, with its excellent collection of orbital and lander photos placed all over a huge photographic map montage – kind of a Martian street view. So far, no signs of shops or towns – but that may soon change.

I have a strange feeling that I know Mars, that I’ve lived there, felt the very slight push of its highest speed winds through my hair, the crunch of its ancient, crusty soil under my naked feet... And all without a space suit!

Of course, I haven’t been alone on Mars. Not only have I been surrounded by the transported presences of the scientists and spacecraft designers and controllers, but of course by fellow science fiction writers. Kim Stanley Robinson, Gregory Benford, Kevin Anderson and many others have joined me in writing about what’s been called The Matter of Mars... And most recently, Andy Weir has done a fine job bringing our favourite planet up to date for a new audience with *The Martian*.

No secret that we owe more than a tip of the hat to previous armchair explorers. HG Wells, Ray Bradbury, Robert A Heinlein and Arthur C Clarke took different aspects of the Mars first proposed by Schiaparelli and Percival Lowell, and given a mythically significant twist by Edgar Rice Burroughs – rooting it firmly in the thoughts and hopes of many through the 1950s and into the 21st century.

In the 1930s, Stanley Weinbaum wrote “A Martian Odyssey”, a striking and pioneering examination of the possible strangeness of Martian life. Weinbaum’s surrealistic sense of humour has spread far and wide since, from Warner Brothers cartoons to my own imaginings. Weinbaum’s strangely bird-like, leaping and head-plunging Tweel is my constant guide.

Thoughts about Mars have far-ranging effects on our popular culture. Burroughs’ John Carter, coming from Earth, was able to jump far, run quite fast, and exhibit significant strength on the lower-gravity surface of Mars. But the greatest kick to our imaginations, delivered by Mars, is doubtless the thought that here is a world with the potential for life. That hope may yet be realised, but at the moment, our thoughts have turned to even stranger worlds – moons, mostly – far out in the solar system, so-called “Roof Worlds” like Europa and Titan and Enceladus where liquid water almost certainly exists under heavy ice. Even far Pluto, demoted to a Kuiper Belt object, is being considered as an inner-oceanic world, under extreme cold. Will that raise its status to planet once again?

Mars has taught us well, but the mysteries are far from resolved – and the race to find our next home, and our biological cousins, is still on... ●

Take Back The Sky, the final book in Greg Bear’s War Dogs Trilogy, is published by Gollancz on 26 January.



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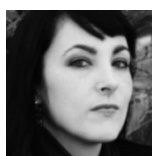
15

CONTAINS STRONG
VIOLENCE

TAILCHASER'S SONG

by Tad Williams, 1985

Lila Bowen gets the cat treats out for a very special moggy

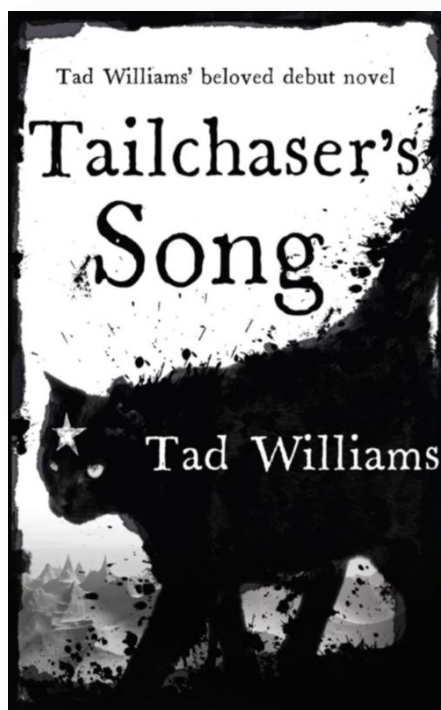


In the rejection letter for his first query, Tad Williams read the same thing querying novelists are currently told: “We don’t do animal books.”

In a twist rarely seen, a major publisher acquired *Tailchaser’s Song* in response to his second query, and DAW is no doubt pleased to remain the bestselling fantasy writer’s primary publisher. Whether you’re judging by the blurbs (Andre Norton! Tanith Lee! *Cat Fancy* magazine!), the sales, or the computer-animated movie that will be released in 2018, there’s a very good reason why this animal book became a success despite breaking the number one rule in publishing.

In the 1980s, YA wasn’t a genre, much less a force of nature. Young readers faced a challenge in finding books that bridged the gap from childish chapter books to adult books with adult themes. I still remember the day in 1986 when I bought my sixth edition paperback of *Tailchaser’s Song* from a bookseller. I was nine, and it was the only book I could find that seemed interesting and in my Lexile range as an accelerated reader. I was immediately drawn to the hypnotic ginger cat on the cover. This book spoke to me, on my level, about what I wanted: a relatable character having the exciting fantasy adventures usually reserved for creatures I really couldn’t relate to – adults.

Perhaps this is the great, lasting strength of *Tailchaser’s Song*: it’s that rare book that speaks to children and adults alike. The precise, evocative prose is enchanting without being needlessly complex, as compelling to me at 39 as it was at nine. The characters and themes are timeless, the coming-of-age message as poignant to an adult as to a child. Adventure,



romance, fear, loss, shame, myth, magic, cats: it has everything. Unlike my other favourite at the time, *Watership Down*, the story focuses on Fritti Tailchaser as the centre of his world in the same egocentric way children see themselves. Through his eyes, I felt that I, too, could take on villainous tabby Grizraz Hearteater, even if defeating General Woundwort required an army.

About the theme, Williams has said, “the need to learn about oneself, to find out who you

are before you can expect to change things in this or any world, is something I still work with all the time, in my books and my life.” As *Tailchaser* triumphs, the reader is invited on that journey in a way that feels more safe, organic and relateable than the typical fantasy tropes. This hero is no scion to a royal throne, no bearded man wielding a broadsword.

Tailchaser is an engaging vehicle to explore growth and choice, his strengths balanced with accessible flaws. Today, we have Katniss Everdeen, but in 1985, we had a little orange cat.

Williams himself acknowledges the nods to Tolkien, admitting his own love of *The Lord Of The Rings* and adding, “But even something wonderful should still not be swallowed whole without critical examination.” Although he dealt with his issues with Tolkien more deeply in *Memory, Sorrow And Thorn*, he limits his homage to a scene in *Tailchaser’s Song* in which the feline version of Galadriel is encountered biting her posterior, because that’s what cats do (even if elves are only ever elegant).

This playfulness around fantasy elements, interwoven with the serious thought behind the mythos of Williams’s world, creates a spellbinding story that withstands the test of time. *Tailchaser’s Song* is an ideal entry point for young readers to the sometimes inaccessible world of fantasy, as invigorating and tempting as a dash of catnip. ●

Lila Bowen’s latest book, Conspiracy Of Ravens, is out now from Orbit.

Like this? Try these!

THE WILD ROAD
by GABRIEL KING (1999)

→ A kitten named Tag goes on a journey on a magic road, where he meets clever, anthropomorphic characters. How can anyone resist a fox called Loves A Dustbin?



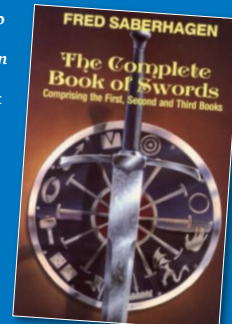
THE PLAGUE DOGS
by RICHARD ADAMS (1977)

→ This book by the author of *Watership Down* follows two damaged dogs who’ve escaped from the horrors of an animal research facility. Lyrical and heartbreaking.



NEXT ISSUE ↓

In our next Book Club (in *SFX* 284, on sale 1 February), *Restoration Game* author Bradley Beaulieu writes about Fred Saberhagen’s *The Book Of Swords*, the trilogy from the ’80s. Whether you’ve never read it before or fancy giving it another go, this is your chance to peruse it before a top writer gives his verdict.



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saga came to planet
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1977

8 MARCH

First issue of Marvel's
Star Wars adaptation
released (see p60)

1 MAY

First public screening of
Star Wars in San
Francisco



25 MAY

Star Wars opens in 32
cinemas in New York, Los



Angeles and San
Francisco

28 NOVEMBER

George Lucas completes
story treatment for *The
Empire Strikes Back*

27 DECEMBER

Star Wars premieres in
the UK

1978

1 FEB

Star Wars Weekly
launches in the UK

1 MARCH

*Splinter Of The Mind's
Eye* released, the first
novel in the Expanded
Universe



THE | STAR ROYAL BLOOD



“We were treated like rock stars!” Four decades on, **CARRIE FISHER** remembers the movie that changed her life. Oliver Pfeiffer has an audience with Her Worshipfulness

MARCH

First wave of 3 3/4" Kenner action figures go on sale, priced at 99p in the UK

3 APRIL

Star Wars bags seven Oscars. It's also nominated for Best Picture and Director

21 JULY

Star Wars gets its first rerelease, and its first tweak: C-3PO has an extra line in this print

17 NOVEMBER

The *Star Wars Holiday Special* airs. It's as if a million voices suddenly cried out in terror...



1979

5 MARCH

Principal photography on *The Empire Strikes Back* begins in Finse, Norway

11 MARCH

A syndicated *Star Wars* comic strip launches in 214 newspapers

1980

A second rerelease for *Star Wars*, complete with the first trailer for *Empire*

1980

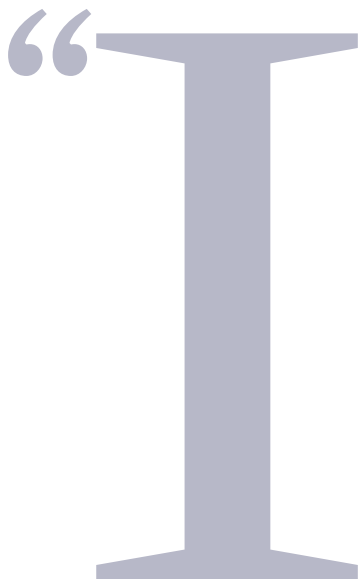
16 MARCH

Mark Hamill guests on *The Muppet Show*, wearing his *Empire* outfit

12 APRIL

Empire novelisation released. The line, "I am your father" is out there





“It’s only been positive,” Carrie Fisher says, with a gleam. “I had a really good time making *Star Wars*. I was very young and got to be the only girl in an all-boy fantasy so that was fun!”

In the four decades following the release of *A New Hope*, it’s arguably been Fisher who has remained the most consistently enthusiastic about her time in that galaxy far, far away – even if it’s been by adopting an increasingly sardonic approach toward the franchise that made her a star.

From the beginning, she says, she was blown away by the possibilities of George Lucas’s vision. “I remember I read the script out loud with a friend of mine, Miguel Ferrer, who became an actor. It read fantastic. We both wanted to play the part of Han Solo because that was the best part. I couldn’t imagine how they were going to pull it off [but] I definitely wanted to be in it given that they had a chance at pulling it off.”

As Fisher reveals, it was far from an easy experience for the 19-year-old hired to embody the feistiest of screen princesses. “When I got the part they told me I had to lose 15 pounds so I thought I’d better lose that or they’ll fire me! I kept thinking they would realise they’d made a mistake so I kept very quiet, which, if you know me is unbelievable!”

And as for Leia’s now legendary space buns... “When [George Lucas] said, ‘We’re going to put that awful hairstyle on you,’ I grew to love it. ‘What do you think of this?’ they asked. ‘Do you



The Happy Princess at the start of her journey.

a month before the movie opens...

21 MAY
The Empire Strikes Back released



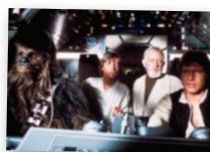
1981

20 FEB
George Lucas completes the first draft of *Revenge Of The Jedi*

9 MARCH
National Public Radio adapts *Star Wars* for the airwaves

10 APRIL

Star Wars gets a third release, now with *Episode IV – A New Hope* subtitle



1982

11 JANUARY
Revenge Of The Jedi commences principal photography at Elstree Studios

MAY
The Empire Strikes Back released for Atari and



Mattel Intellivision systems – the first *Star Wars* console game

27 MAY
Star Wars arrives for rental on VHS and Betamax

24 OCTOBER
Star Wars gets its UK television premiere





Letting her hair down on the snowy set of *Empire*.

Peter Cushing and George Lucas size up the young Carrie.



Getting smoochy with Chewie on *Jedi*!

like it?" I said, 'It's fantastic!' So that's why that [hairstyle] exists. I did whatever they said as I kept thinking they'd realise what they'd done and fire me."

Following a brief "Good luck!" peck on Luke's lips before swinging to safety from stormtroopers in *A New Hope*, Leia smooched with both her unbeknownst-at-the-time screen brother and love rival Han in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Fisher has her own distinctive take on all that onscreen locking of lips.

"Well, Harrison always said that he doesn't like screen kissing," she shares. "It is weird. It's kissing for money and there's something a little more extreme than that and a word for it so..." she trails off. "I much prefer and enjoy watching other people screen kiss. [Alfred Hitchcock's 1946 thriller] *Notorious* has the best screen kiss going because they used to have a limit on how long you could hold the

"AT THE TIME I DIDN'T LIKE IT BUT I NOW LIKE SEEING MYSELF IN THE METAL BIKINI CAUSE I LOOKED REALLY GOOD THEN"

kiss back then, which was like 18 seconds so they kept breaking it and breaking it and talking and kissing again – it's fantastic. But that's not the kind of kissing that I believe I did in *Star Wars*. It's certainly far from hot – you're very caught up in memorising your lines so you have your mind on this whole other thing. The kissing is more than secondary."

Arguably steamier was when Leia donned a revealing metal bikini for Jabba's palace in *Return Of The Jedi*. Fisher later posed in the same scanty outfit for the cover of *Rolling Stone*. How does she feel looking back at that immortal image? "At the time I didn't like it but I now like seeing myself in the metal bikini cause I really looked good then," she laughs. "I didn't know it [at the time] so now I look back and say, 'Man, I should've paid attention!' At the time I let other people pay attention."

Getting her head around some of George Lucas's infamously tortuous dialogue was, she says, a struggle. "My first scene was with Peter →

1983

27 JANUARY
Third *Star Wars* movie now retitled *Return Of The Jedi*

14 FEBRUARY
The *Empire* radio adaptation broadcast on National Public Radio



25 MAY

Return Of The Jedi released, breaking records for the biggest opening day gross



1984

11 MARCH
The final *Star Wars* newspaper strip is published

25 NOVEMBER
Spin-off telemovie *The Ewok Adventure* airs on ABC in the US



1985

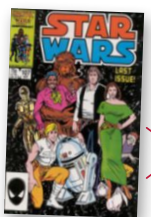
7 SEPTEMBER
The Ewoks And Droids Adventure Hour cartoon brings the joy of *Star Wars* to kids' TV

24 NOVEMBER
Ewoks: The Battle For Endor airs on ABC



1986

MAY
The final issue of Marvel's *Star Wars* comic book is published



Cushing and I said [my line], 'I thought I recognised your foul stench when I arrived onboard' how I thought people would say it: 'I got onboard and there was this foul stench and I thought I recognised it and it was you!' I wanted to say it like that. George came up to me and said, 'This is really serious. You've lost your planet, your mother and your stepfather, your album collection and all those things...' and so I did it seriously. But I do like yelling things at people: 'You came in that thing? You're braver than I thought!' I liked that I could say that kind of stuff. However, some of the other lines were really hard because they were a pretend language ["Why, you stuck-up, half-witted, scruffy-looking nerfherder!"]. So you had to say them as if you were saying regular old slang. [Harrison] would rewrite and add his own stuff all the time."

Ford's dismay with the *Star Wars* screenplay remains legendary. He famously told Lucas

"I WAS WATCHING IT TWO WAYS: I WAS THINKING, 'WHAT A FAT FACE THAT GIRL HAS' AND 'WHAT A COOL MOVIE!'"

"You can type this shit but you can't say it!" What was the megastar-in-the-making like to work with back then? "Everybody in the early morning on set is not going to be someone you're going to want to talk to but Harrison could be a lot of fun," Fisher reveals (this conversation took place before her recent revelations about her affair with Ford). "We were all kind of concentrating and Harrison can be a very serious guy, depending on how many beers he's had! I was 19. Harrison was 33 so he wasn't skipping around and stuff. It was a job and a really fun job but it was still work."

The saga became substantially more serious for Leia toward the end of *Return Of The Jedi* when she learns she's not only sibling to one-time prospective love interest Luke Skywalker but also the daughter of Darth Vader. "I didn't know [Luke] was my brother, otherwise I would've treated him a lot worse!" Fisher reflects with tongue firmly placed in



Sensibly dressed to take on the Empire.

cheek. "I would've made him clean up my messes and help with my homework."

But what about the other whammy: learning that your father is Vader? "Isn't that a bitch!" she deadpans. "Look at Darth... he doesn't look like someone who could come to school on Father's Day or walk me down the aisle and give me away. But it would be interesting if he did. I wish he were a dad like that! I really don't think it occurred to me when they told me. I said, 'I know... somehow I've always known'."

Literally I was told to do that and say, 'I know... somehow I've always known' like I'm a puppet."

It's safe to say the majority of cast and crew never anticipated the phenomenon of *Star Wars*, one that endures to this day, 40 years on. "Nobody knew, nobody knew!" says Fisher, unequivocally. "I remember seeing it and thinking, 'Wow, I've never seen anything like that!' But I was watching it two ways: I was thinking, 'What a fat face that girl has' and 'What a cool movie!' Those thoughts interrupt

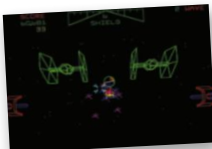
1987

9 JANUARY
Star Tours opens at Disneyland in California, complete with FX by ILM

23 MAY
The first Lucasfilm-approved convention is held in LA

1988

1 JANUARY
Atari's *Star Wars* arcade game comes to the Commodore 64



1989

12 JULY
Star Tours opens in Tokyo Disneyland

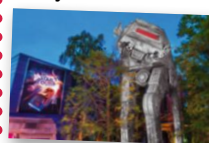


19 SEPTEMBER

Now officially historically significant, *Star Wars* is inducted into the National Film Library by the US Library Of Congress

1990

13 JANUARY
Star Tours opens at Walt Disney World in Florida



1991

1 MAY
Timothy Zahn's novel *Heir To The Empire* ignites a new era of *Star Wars* fandom

15 NOVEMBER
Star Wars arrives on Nintendo, courtesy of Lucasfilm Games



Quick spot of dentistry on a Gamorrean guard?



Getting Hoth directions from *Empire's* Irvin Kershner.

each other, thank god, in one direction. George is the best storyteller. He has an amazing imagination. But no, they didn't know it was going to be a big hit. If they knew it was going to be a big hit they wouldn't necessarily have booked us on a press tour of America. It didn't need it! But we were there anyway, so they booked it like we were going to have to [peddle] this unpopular horse. However it was a very popular horse so we just went round America and we were treated like rock stars!"

40 MINUS 40

We're now as far away from *Star Wars* as Luke and co were from 1937... Scary, much?

● Strip-to-screen adapts are nothing new. In 1937 anvil-jawed crime-buster Dick Tracy starred in a cliffhanging Republic serial, battling the Lame One and his diabolical sound disintegrator.

● *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs* was Disney's first full-length animated movie and the highest-grossing sound pic of its day. Eighty years on, the House of Mouse owns the Lucasverse...

● A year on from his screen debut, Flash Gordon still reigned as the number one SF hero, facing the Tusk-Men and Beast-Men of Mongo in Alex Raymond's newspaper strips, a key influence on George Lucas.

● Superman was still a year away, Batman two, so the Shadow and other pulp mag heroes ruled the newsstands. Orson Welles played him in a radio serial, a year before unleashing Martian firepower over the airwaves.

● Future Lando Calrissian Billy Dee Williams was born 6 April 1937 in New York. Over in Britain, Alec Guinness did Shakespeare at the Old Vic while Peter Cushing was in rep in Southampton, leaving for Hollywood two years later.

Nick Setchfield



DECEMBER
Dark Horse Comics launch post-Jedi adventures with *Dark Empire*



1992

12 APRIL
Euro Disney opens in France, complete with Star Tours

NOVEMBER
Super Star Wars released for Super Nintendo

1993

FEBRUARY
LucasArts releases floppy disc flight sim *Star Wars: X-Wing* for PC



SEPTEMBER
The *Star Wars* trilogy arrives on laserdisc

NOVEMBER
Rebel Assault is the first *Star Wars* CD-ROM game

1994

JULY
Star Wars: TIE Fighter released for PCs and Macs

11 AUGUST
Peter Cushing dies

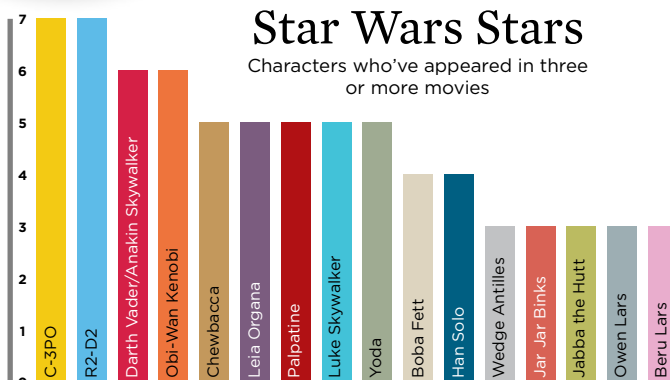
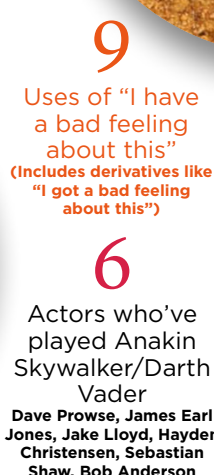
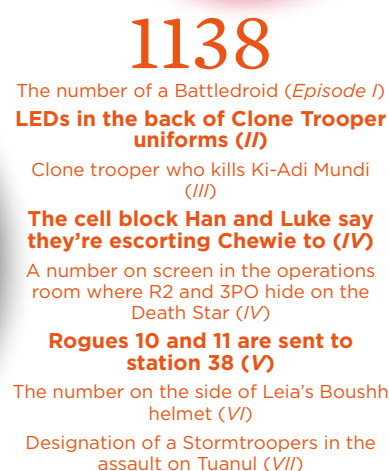
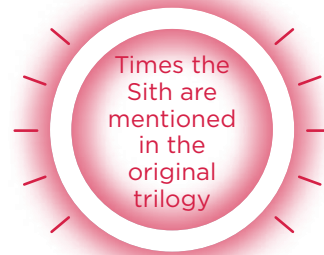
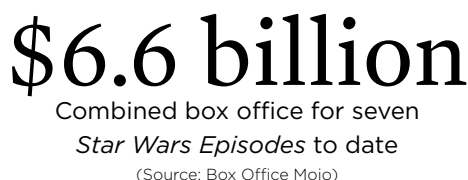
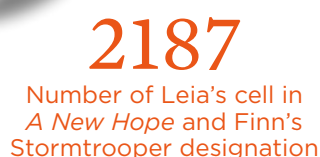
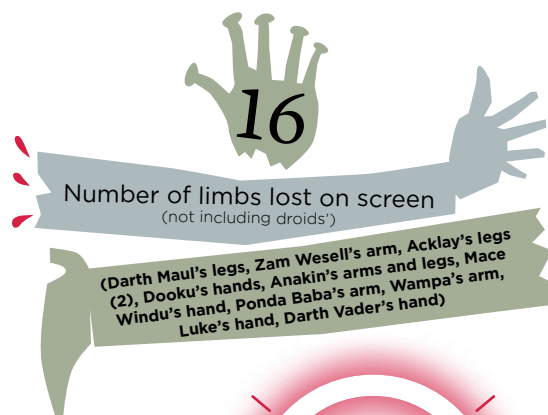
1 NOVEMBER
George Lucas begins screenplay for *Star Wars: Episode I*





STAT WARS

Vital statistics from a galaxy far, far away *



* This just takes in Episodes I-VII, so does not include *Rogue One*, the *Clone Wars* movie or any other spin-offs.

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THE ICON BOBA JOB



JEREMY BULLOCH was Boba Fett, the biggest scene-stealer in the *Star Wars* universe. Calum Waddell meets the man behind the Mandalorian armour

1995

15 FEBRUARY
First person shooter *Star Wars: Dark Forces* released for PC

30 NOVEMBER

Rebel Assault II: The Hidden Empire incorporates first new live-action *Star Wars* footage since *Return Of The Jedi*



1996

1 APRIL
Star Wars goes multimedia as the *Shadows Of The Empire* novel is released, tying in with a comic book, N64 game (below), soundtrack CD and toy line



OCTOBER

Return Of The Jedi adapted as a radio drama for NPR

26 NOVEMBER
The Force is online as StarWars.com launches. Beware the power of the dial-up!

1997

31 JANUARY
Special Edition of *A New Hope* released, restored and remixed with controversial new FX. The saga enjoys a new surge of popularity among Generation X



14 FEBRUARY

The Empire Strikes Back: Special Edition released

14 MARCH

Return Of The Jedi: Special Edition released

26 JUNE

Photography starts on *Star Wars Episode I*



1998

18 SEPTEMBER
CD-ROM *Star Wars: Behind The Magic* contains never-before-seen deleted scenes from *A New Hope*



17 NOVEMBER

Teaser trailer for *The Phantom Menace* the biggest event in internet history to date

1999

16 MAY
The Phantom Menace premieres, smashing the box office with a US release on 19 May

2000

26 JUNE
Principal photography kicks off on *Episode II*

5 AUGUST
Sir Alec Guinness dies



2001

29 APRIL
Despite a grassroots campaign, "Jedi Knight" is not recognised by the UK census

15 JUNE

A fan recuts *The Phantom Menace* as *The Phantom Edit*. The age of unofficial retoolings begins...

15 OCTOBER

The Phantom Menace becomes the first *Star Wars* movie on DVD





Despite decades working in film and television, Leicestershire-born actor Jeremy Bulloch will forever be remembered as the man who gave life to Boba Fett. Despite only briefly appearing in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and with the most minimal of backstory, the enigmatic, near-wordless bounty hunter was so damn cool that it was only inevitable he would be asked back for 1983's *Return Of The Jedi*. Speaking today, Bulloch admits that – in retrospect – he sees the appeal in the character...

"There is something about the antihero isn't there?" he admits. "Fans like villains. And I think that when he got killed in *Return Of The Jedi* it actually upset people. I remember seeing the film in the cinema, and I went to see it a few times, and hearing members of the audience say, quite loudly, 'What? You can't just kill him like that! It happened too easily!' They obviously liked him and that was why he was brought back in the prequels. Plus, he answers Darth Vader back in *The Empire Strikes Back* and not many characters do that and get away with it [laughs]."

Bulloch admits excitement at the possibility of a standalone Boba Fett movie.

"Yes, I think it is a terrific idea," he enthuses. "I think it is brilliant that Boba Fett suddenly has a storyline. I mean look, let's face it – he was just a peripheral character in the original films but, through doing the prequels, they have made so much more out of him. Now the general public – who probably once associated *Star Wars* mainly with R2-D2, Darth Vader and Chewbacca – also know who Boba Fett is. I especially enjoyed how they revealed that he



And here's one he hunted earlier...



Now that's what you call a masked ball...

was a clone all along. That was a part of the prequels I enjoyed."

A cameo appearance in 2005's *Revenge Of The Sith* gave Bulloch the chance to realise one final *Star Wars* ambition – to be directed by the man who started it all...

"TO BE HONEST, I THOUGHT BOBA FETT SHOULD HAVE PUT UP MORE OF A FIGHT IN RETURN OF THE JEDI"

"Oh goodness, what a great opportunity that was. I was able to work with George Lucas and it was like going back 25 years. I had met him before, of course, but even as a director – on this big blockbuster project – he was the same person he was back in 1980: gentle, considerate and very, very quiet. However, that is *Star Wars* in general – I have worked with some bullies in my time and these films had three very easy-going men calling the shots."

The clone storyline caused division in the *Star Wars* fan universe – but Bulloch has more of an argument with his demise in *Return Of The Jedi*, turned into so much Sarlacc-feed in the Great Pit of Carkoon...

2002

16 MAY
Episode II: Attack Of The Clones premieres in the US

2003

7 APRIL
Star Wars: Clone Wars comes to Xbox

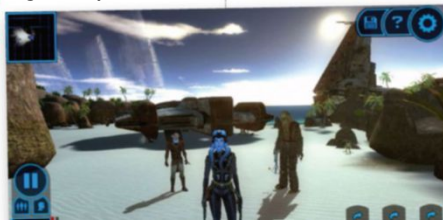
30 JUNE
Principal photography begins on *Episode III*

7 JULY

Online multiplayer game *Star Wars: Galaxies – An Empire Divided* launches

15 JULY

Knights Of The Old Republic arrives on Xbox



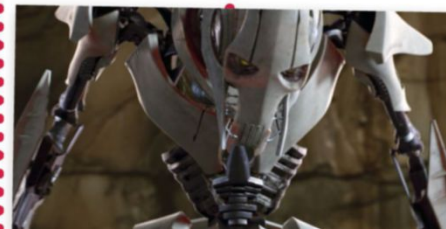
7 NOV

Lucasfilm teams with Cartoon Network on Genndy Tartakovsky's bite-sized, animated *Clone Wars*



2004

21 SEPTEMBER
The newly remastered original trilogy lands on DVD. Shooter game *Star Wars: Battlefront* also released



2005

16 MAY
Worldwide release of *Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith*



That's cinematography
by Peter Suschitzky.

"When I got told I was going to be killed in *Return Of the Jedi*, I was not disappointed until I saw that he was going to go so quickly," reveals the actor, now aged 71 and still a signing regular at conventions. "To be honest, I thought that he should have put up more of a fight. But that's showbiz, that's the film industry, and it is nice that he still has such an aura around him even after he was disposed of so easily [laughs]. If I could have written it, though, I would have had more of a battle between Han Solo and Boba Fett. I got the impression that they must have fought together in the past and now they were enemies and this was their chance to finish it!"

REX (3)

THE EXTRA STRIKES BACK

Obscure bit-parters we'd like to see more of in the new *Star Wars* continuity*



YADDLE

APPEARED IN *THE PHANTOM MENACE*

● Thought Yoda was the only one of his kind? Another of his (still unnamed) species actually makes an appearance in *The Phantom Menace* as a member of the Jedi Council. At 450 years old, she's a mere youngling compared to Yoda, and leaves the council shortly after the Battle of Naboo. We'd love to see her team up with Yoda and explore their homeworld.



ZAM WESELL

APPEARED IN *ATTACK OF THE CLONES*

● She's the bounty hunter who kick-starts *Episode II* with an attempt on Padme's life, prompting a madcap chase across Coruscant. But most importantly, she's a shapeshifter, something that makes her a unique proposition in the *Star Wars* universe (another of her Clawdite species appeared in *The Clone Wars*). *Star Wars* loves its bounty hunters, and Wesell definitely warrants more screentime.



B'OMARR MONKS

APPEARED IN *RETURN OF THE JEDI*

● You know that spidery robot that freaks out C-3PO in Jabba's Palace? That's actually a droid carrying the disembodied brain of a B'omarr monk, the original residents of the vile gangster's lair. In *Star Wars* lore, the monks discard their organic bodies as part of their path to enlightenment – an intriguing premise that deserves to be explored further.



PRUNE FACE

APPEARED IN *RETURN OF THE JEDI*

● Anyone who had this original Kenner figure back in the day (this writer included) would have wondered who the hell he was – he didn't even get a proper name, Orrimaarko, until the '90s. He's one of a group of Dressellians who appear (barely in focus) in the background of the Rebel briefing – his most notable appearance since has been in a *Robot Chicken* sketch (bit.ly/PruneFace). We'd love to know something – anything! – about him.



RANCOR KEEPER

APPEARED IN *RETURN OF THE JEDI*

● Another bit-partner gifted a figure, Malakili is the rotund, topless chap who looks like a wrestler from ITV's *World Of Sport*, and blubs uncontrollably when Luke Skywalker offs the Rancor. Why the hell did he have a monster as a pet? Why did he end up working for Jabba? (In the old expanded universe, he ended up opening a restaurant!) **Richard Edwards**

* Yes, we know some of these characters have already been revisited in the old Legends EU.

2006

12 SEPTEMBER
Original, unrestored theatrical cuts accompany DVD releases of *Episodes IV, V and VI*



2007

28 MARCH
US postage stamps commemorate the 30th anniversary

15 JUNE
Robot Chicken spoofs *Star Wars* (left)



13 JULY

Celebration Europe held at London Docklands – the first official *Star Wars* con outside the US

23 SEPTEMBER

Family Guy takes on *Star Wars* with *Blue Harvest*

2008

15 AUGUST
First animated *Star Wars* film, *Clone Wars*, released

16 SEPTEMBER

The Force Unleashed is released – and becomes the fastest selling *Star Wars* game yet

3 OCTOBER

Star Wars: The Clone Wars debuts on Cartoon Network



2009

2 OCTOBER
Season two of *The Clone Wars* begins, titled *Rise Of The Bounty Hunters*

22 DECEMBER
Something, Something, Something, Darkside Is *Family Guy's Empire* spoof

THE COLLECTOR BOUNTY HUNTER

Joseph McCabe journeys to the bright centre of the
Star Wars collecting universe...

If there's one pilgrimage every *Star Wars* fan must make in their lifetime, it's to Rancho Obi-Wan (<https://www.ranchoobiwan.org>). Located in Sonoma County, California, this nonprofit museum features the world's largest privately owned collection of *Star Wars* merchandise, collectables and memorabilia. Chairman and president Steve Sansweet describes it as a natural extension of his former position as head of Fan Relations at Lucasfilm. "Lucasfilm," he says proudly, "was the first movie company to go out directly to the fans."

Housed within the 9,000-square-foot converted barn of a former chicken ranch, the collection's 300,000 items include everything from a full-size Jar Jar Binks frozen in carbonite to Boba Fett's original stunt gun to a vintage Japanese C-3PO action figure that fires a missile from its belly button. Here are a few more artefacts *SFX* saw on our visit to this Jedi Mecca...



ANIMATRONIC CANTINA BAND

Of his very own music-playing Figrin D'an and the Modal Nodes, Sansweet tells us, "These were at the big toy store chain FAO Schwarz in Las Vegas, on display on the second floor behind the soda counter. They were listed as 'alien mannequins' when FAO went bankrupt. Next to them is the actual door to the Cantina."



ALIEN MASKS

"Here we have masks from the original moulds. Duros, who became *The Clone Wars*' Cad Bane, and unused Duros hands. As well as the Givin [aka the Cantina's Rick Baker-created Elis Helrot aka Skull Head], based on Edvard Munch's *The Scream*. [The third mask] was a gift from a friend of mine who used it in the 2012 *Star Wars* Volkswagen commercial for the Super Bowl."



2010

26 OCTOBER
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II released



2011

20 MAY
Star Tours: The Adventures Continue launches at Walt Disney World

22 JULY
Lego Star Wars: The Padawan Menace airs on Cartoon Network,

reimagining George Lucas's galaxy in brick form

16 SEPTEMBER
Star Wars: The Complete Saga arrives on Blu-ray

20 DECEMBER
Online roleplaying game *Star Wars: The Old Republic* launches

2012

10 FEBRUARY
Episode I: The Phantom Menace gets a 3D rerelease

30 OCTOBER
Disney buy Lucasfilm and announce that *Episode VII* will arrive in 2015. Fireworks over Endor!

2013

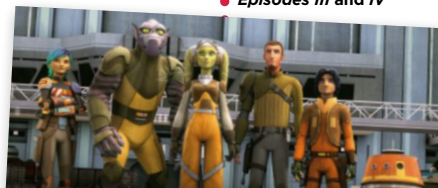
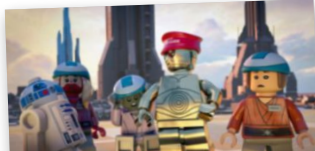
25 JANUARY
JJ Abrams named director of *Episode VII*

5 FEBRUARY
Disney announce the new trilogy will alternate with standalone films

2014

16 MAY
Principal photography on *The Force Awakens* begins in Abu Dhabi

3 OCTOBER
CGI show *Star Wars Rebels* launches, set between *Episodes III* and *IV*





CUSTOM-MADE ACTION FIGURES

While Kenner and now Hasbro's *Star Wars* action figures are the most popular toys from that galaxy far, far away, the true superfan has one or two customised figures in their collection. Sansweet, however, again takes top prize. "These are everybody's favourite inaction figures - Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen... I do indeed love these."

About three trillion times better than your average toy shop.



ORIGINAL PROMOTIONAL BANNER

"This is one of my most precious belongings. This is [*Star Wars* artist] Ralph McQuarrie's painted art for Starkiller, the original composite character. The art was used on decals and t-shirts, but this was done for the sixth year of Comic-Con in San Diego. Ralph told me, 'That's my original concept for the logo, and I still like it better than theirs!' It's probably the world's only hand-painted Ralph McQuarrie banner, from 1976."



FIGURE SCULPTS

"These are beautiful. These are the hard copies on which Lucasfilm did final sculpt approval. The Lucasfilm approval guy said, 'I love them so much. Can you paint one set for me?' So this is hand-painted. What did this become? A Kellogg's UK cereal spoon! You couldn't even tell what character it was... But the Leia sculpt is really pretty."



CHEWBACCA MASK

"This is one of the original Chewbacca appearance masks at Walt Disney World. Those were made by [famed creature mask maker] Don Post. That's when Lucasfilm saw the masks that Disney had been using, that they had bought from a 1993 arena show in Japan called 'The Super Live Adventure'."



C-3PO HANDS

Rancho Obi-Wan holds costume artefacts from many of *Star Wars*' main characters, including "a screen-used C-3PO hand from *The Empire Strikes Back*, and an unused hand that was a gift from Bantha Tracks, the original *Star Wars* Fan Club newsletter... This was given away years ago in a creativity contest."

28 NOVEMBER

There has been an awakening... The first teaser trailer for *Episode VII* torches the internet



2015

16 APRIL

Han and Chewie's appearance in the second *Force Awakens* trailer puts something in the world's eye...



18 DECEMBER

Star Wars: The Force Awakens released worldwide

2016

15 DECEMBER

Rogue One, the first *Star Wars* spin-off movie, released



THE REBELLION NEEDS YOU!

And so does *SFX*...

We want your Force-fuelled memories! Were you among the first to see *Star Wars* in 1977? Did you discover the saga via the prequels? Have you made lifelong friends through your fandom? How big is your collection? What's the coolest bit of merch you own? Which *Star Wars* celebs have you met? Share your stories and show us your photos! We'll print the best in a future issue. Send your memories to sfx@futurenet.com, marked *Star Wars 40*.



MARVEL'S STAR WARS



"O JEDI! SURE FIRE
 BUREAU IS RIGHT - I'LL
 NEVER GET OUT
 HERE!"

"IS THERE
 ANYTHING
 YOU WANT
 TO SAY?"

"YES YOU
 CAN CALL
 ME LARRY!"

"GREAT. LOTS OF
 CARMON BODIES HERE
 - LOT OF ACTION!"

"WELL, MY
 LITTLE
 LARRY -
 YOU'RE GOING
 TO BE
 HERE
 IN HERE
 IN HERE
 SOON!"

"LET'S SEE
 WHAT
 YOU
 GOT!"

"...OH MAN KENOBI
 WOULD USE YOU
 ONLY ONE!"

SNAP

"OH MAN KENOBI
 WOULD USE YOU
 ONLY ONE!"

"WHAT'S THIS? A THREE-
 PERSONAL GLOVE...
 AND SHE'S BEAUTIFUL!"

"OH MAN KENOBI
 WOULD USE YOU
 ONLY ONE!"

BREEP!

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FORCE QUIT

Roy Thomas didn't
feel the Force

The man who adapted *Star Wars* wasn't sold on one crucial aspect of George Lucas's myth-building. "I always hated the Force stuff," Roy Thomas tells *SFX*. "I thought it was nothing but buzz-words and pseudo-philosophy. I liked the ray guns and the robots and the rockets and all of that stuff but the Force is just a bunch of nonsense. A lesson in the Force? I could care less [laughs]! I loved the movie, I just didn't like the Force. I haven't seen the last one, *The Force Awakens*... I'm sure I'm going to love that one!"



Lippincott made a cold call to Stan Lee's office but couldn't get an appointment with Marvel's publisher and media figurehead. He turned instead to Marvel writer Roy Thomas, the man behind a successful comic book version of pulp magazine hero Conan the Barbarian. Thomas clearly had a knack for adapting fantasy properties and was keen to break the lockhold that superheroes held over the industry.

Lippincott met with Thomas in February 1976, accompanied by mutual acquaintance Ed Summer, proprietor of Supersnipe Comic Art Emporium. It was Summer who had first introduced Thomas to Lucas – Lucas was a business partner, in fact, sharing a passion for original comic book artwork (they had swung by Thomas's apartment to admire a Carl Barks painting of Scrooge McDuck). Lippincott made the pitch, armed with a stack of Ralph McQuarrie's pre-production paintings.

"They showed me them one at a time, telling the story," Thomas remembers. "So many concepts I'd never heard of before. Threepio and Obi-Wan Kenobi and Han Solo and Chewbacca the Wookiee... my head started spinning from all these names. It was a little hard to follow! I figured I'd hear them out, be polite about it and wish them well with the movie and that would probably be it."

One picture changed his mind. "I saw this one particular drawing, the so-called cantina



"I REALISED THAT THIS WASN'T
HARDCORE SCIENCE FICTION –
IT WAS SPACE OPERA. AND I
MIGHT BE ABLE TO SELL THAT"

sequence with Han Solo about to get into a shoot-out with an alien. At that point I got interested. I realised that this wasn't really hardcore science fiction, it wasn't 2001. It was space opera, like the old *Planet Comics*. And I thought well, I might be able to sell that. And it might stretch Marvel in another direction."

Marvel was in no state to take risks at this point. For all its hype-fuelled chutzpah, the self-styled House of Ideas was in financial freefall, breaking even at best. Years from the direct sales revolution that would target the hardcore faithful of the comic shops, it still depended on the newsstand frontline. Jim Shooter, then associate editor, recalls the company as "a mess throughout the mid-'70s". Titles were routinely late, or wounded by unscheduled reprints or fill-in issues. Shooter remembers "jeers and derision" over the decision to take on *Star Wars*.

But Marvel was building a portfolio of brand names – *Conan*, *Planet Of The Apes*, *Logan's Run* – and had Hollywood ambitions. It also helped that Lucasfilm essentially gave Marvel the rights for free. The deal: the first five issues would be royalty free for the first 100,000 copies. From issue six *Star Wars* would be licenced by Lucasfilm and Fox to Marvel Comics. The catch: the first two issues had to be out before the film's release in order to build the buzz. Fox's marketing department thought Lippincott was insane for giving away the rights. Marvel's circulation department had its own concerns – could it be done and dusted in two issues, not six? Maybe even just one? It could, said Thomas. But not by him.

"Once we made the deal for *Star Wars* we sat around for several months because we didn't have any materials," Thomas tells *SFX*. "We didn't get any real materials that we could start working on until July, which is almost half a year later."

Thomas was sent a copy of the shooting script. And then another, when he mislaid the





MARVEL TEAM-UP?

A galaxy too far away...

Could '70s Marvelites have seen Spider-Man sharing an adventure with Luke Skywalker? Or Wolverine going toe-to-toe with Chewbacca? Probably not, it seems. "There was never any talk of integrating the *Star Wars* characters into the Marvel Universe," reveals Roy Thomas. "I wasn't really in favour of it. I hadn't even allowed them to cross over Conan with the Marvel characters. *Star Wars* is supposed to be 'a long time ago', so it would have to be a time travel story in addition to everything else. Of course, you can do anything that you can work out a contract and split the money for!"



original in a move to California. "I was slowly unpacking all these boxes. A week or so later I suddenly realised I didn't have the script! I had to get another copy from Lucas."

Lucasfilm wanted a close adaptation. "Even if they hadn't I wouldn't have wanted to change it," says Thomas. "What would have been the sense of that? The dialogue was pretty exact. I think I put in a few too many captions – based on descriptions in the script – because I was really worried that it was going to be hard to follow in places. Of course I purple prosed them up a little bit, but the prose was very purple in the screenplay!"

Issue four opens with Han, Luke, Leia and Chewie blasting Stormtroopers in the bowels of the Death Star. As the weapons ZIK, ZRAP, CRUNK and FZZZ, a caption breezily states "We're kind of in a hurry this issue, so pay attention." "We were trying to sell this to Marvel readers so I would combine what was there in the script with the way I would ordinarily write a comic book," Thomas says. "That's the Marvel style. That's the way Stan had set the thing."

Lucasfilm had approached Marvel with an artist already in mind. Howard Chaykin was a rising star of the American comics scene whose brisk, dynamic style meshed with McQuarrie's. Lucas had been particularly impressed by Chaykin's creation Cody

Starbuck, an interstellar rogue cut from the same swashbuckling cloth as Han Solo. Chaykin was commissioned to create a poster to promote the movie at Comic Con '76.

HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

Lucas met with the Marvel creators on 27 July 1976, 11 days after *Star Wars* wrapped principal photography. "[The film] starts slow and builds," he warned them. "The first couple of issues you're going to be really scraping to try and make something happen." Chaykin told him "the kid who plays Luke is a little soft in the face... he's got a great cleft and that's fine, but he looks like 16, and I'm going to harden him up." Harrison Ford's physiognomy met with more approval. "Han Solo is perfect. He looks like I drew him. He looks like my cliché mercenary hero. He looks like Starbuck."

Thomas remembers meeting the then-unknown Ford. "We were introduced in the office one day. He sort of knew about the comic book but I don't think he cared – I don't think he cared about the movie! Then I ran into him at a party and he made this reference to his 'so-called career', which I always remember. It couldn't have been more than a few days or a week before the movie came out and he wasn't going to be able to say that much longer... His life was about to change forever."

Star Wars was a lifeline for Marvel. Sales were good on the first two issues, stratospheric on the third as the film exploded. Reprints, multiple formats and international licences rescued the company from its immediate financial straits. The title would continue beyond the six-issue adaptation as Thomas became the first writer to propel Lucas's heroes "Beyond the movie! Beyond the galaxy!" But his first story – a cosmic *Magnificent Seven* pastiche, foregrounding Han and Chewie and notoriously featuring a gun-slinging green rabbit named Jaxxon, much to Lucas's dismay – would be his last. There were too many restrictions now, too many cautious eyes at Lucasfilm. The Luke and Leia romance was off-limits. Darth Vader too. That throwaway mention of the Clone Wars? Don't go there.

"All of a sudden it was this big sacred cow," Thomas remembers. "There were suddenly layers and layers to get through to do anything. It was really George Lucas's dream – and that's great. I loved the movie and I'm happy it's had the life it's had, but it wasn't my dream. I wasn't interested in being a minor functionary on *Star Wars*. I'm really happy to have been part of it – and I'm really happy that I got out of it as quickly as I could!"

No regrets, then? Thomas smiles. "I should have just directly come out and asked George for a bonus!" ●

LARA PULVER

The *Sherlock* star is out for blood as the *Underworld* saga returns

Words by Nick Setchfield /// Photography by Sarah Dunn

As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle told us, “To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman”. Lara Pulver’s 2012 turn as high-end kinkster Irene Adler in *Sherlock* gave her a career boost as sharp as the crack of a riding crop, earning her instant internet worship and setting fire to the twitching net curtains of the *Daily Mail*. Now she’s the villain in *Underworld: Blood Wars*, a key player in the centuries-old grudge-match between the vampires and the Lycans. It’s a role that called for her to back-flip in leather and heels, wield a mean Spanish rapier and knock back a goblet of blood. “I think it was diluted grape juice!” she tells *SFX*. “We only did two or three takes because I was like, ‘I’m going to get a sugar high from this!’” So, it wasn’t a cheeky swig of Beaujolais, then? “No, I requested the Merlot but it didn’t come!”

This is the fifth *Underworld* film – and your first. How did it feel to jump into the franchise?

☛ I rewatched the original *Underworld*. They were very headstrong about bringing it back to the roots of the first film – they said, “If you don’t watch any more, it’s fine.” But I had to do my homework to a certain degree because some of the characters I speak about were introduced in later films. This genre isn’t always my go-to thing but I saw this film yesterday and it was so entertaining. It’s fast, slick and it doesn’t take itself too seriously. Anna Foerster, our director, has such a wonderful wit and zest for life, and it’s so evident in this film. It’s hugely helped my character, because she is so fun and sexy and badass. It just has space for that.

So who is Semira?

☛ She’s the leader of the Eastern coven. She’s a slightly wounded soul. It’s almost like she’s seeking power for some sort of validation. When she discovers that Selene’s blood would mean she’d be immortal then that quest for power becomes like a laser to her. She’s a politician. She’s also a manipulator. So yes, a politician [laughs]!

How do you get into the mindset of a vampire?

☛ Oh gosh... look good in black! What’s kind of weird is the second you’ve got those teeth in, and the eyes, and you’re in Prague shooting in these wonderful sets, it’s your reality.

How did you cope with the fangs?

☛ Mainly it’s learning to speak with them. We had our daily

fangs! You have your softer fangs and then you have your battle fangs. It’s weird how comfortable you become with them. What’s slightly disconcerting is that if you watch the playback you don’t look like yourself – they change your face shape. They heighten your bone structure, make you more sullen, make your jaw look more pronounced. It’s borderline animalistic, I guess.

Actors always need to find the truth of any character they play. But was part of you dying to smack your lips and relish being a villain?

☛ I was very aware of never becoming a caricature. I could have chewed the furniture but I was really strict on myself. Anna would say to me, “Go a little further in the next take...” I think I was playing safe. There’s such a fine line between being believable and becoming the pantomime villainess. You need to allow the whole picture to do it for you. It’s a culmination of the look, the silhouette, the style, the genre. It’s finding the nuances and the line you cannot cross.

***Sherlock* changed your profile overnight. How did it feel to go viral like that?**

☛ It’s one of the biggest compliments you could get, really. So long as the support structure around you – your ma and pa, your beloved, your friends that you’ve known for 30 years – still know that you’re the goofball who’s going to burn the pasta when they come over, then you stay grounded. And also, it’s transitory, you know? That stuff will come, and it will go, and that’s part of having a career, and having longevity as an actor. It’s wonderful when you look at the actors in our country, the Maggie Smiths and the Judi Denchs – and you see there’s a journey to go on there. And who knows if those peaks and troughs will be more extreme with 21st century technology? I think ultimately it’s a compliment. It’s literally people going, “We like your work.”

Would you like a rematch with *Sherlock*?

☛ Gosh, if they can match what they did... or top it! That’s a hard feat. It was such a beautifully crafted episode, from the writing to the cinematography to Paul McGuigan’s direction, the combination of the whole thing. Top it if you can, for all of us! But it’s also so tricky because it’s hard not to become self-aware of something that happened back in 2012, and people’s opinion of it. Can you go back to something objectively? I don’t know. I don’t know how the boys have gone back season after season. Maybe it’s best to leave with your head held high! ●

Underworld: Blood Wars opens on 13 January.

Biodata

Occupation

→ Actress

Born

→ 1 September 1980

From

→ Southend-on-Sea, Essex

Greatest Hits

→ *Sherlock*, *Spooks*, *Game Of Thrones*, *Fleming*, *Da Vinci’s Demons*

Random Fact

→ In a stage production of *Grease* she understudied everyone from Frenchie to Rizzo. “Which wig do you want to put on tonight, Lara?”

"I WAS VERY
AWARE OF
NEVER
BECOMING A
CARICATURE"



WAR DRUMS ARE SOUNDING IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM...

EXPANSION POLICY

BRYAN CAIRNS IS ON SET FOR THE INCENDIARY
SECOND SEASON OF **THE EXPANSE**



Prepare yourselves for war. Yes, intergalactic conflict appears imminent in season two of *The Expanse*, Syfy's future-set saga based on the novels by James SA Corey. By the end of the first season, rogue ship's captain James Holden, his crew and disgruntled detective Joe Miller found

themselves swept up in a massive conspiracy that could pit Earth against Mars.

The finale found Holden and Miller discovering a horrific secret that was clearly worth killing for. Protogen, a security firm from Earth, had unleashed an infectious, sentient alien agent, known as the protomolecule, onto the Eros Station, one of the first staging posts of mankind's colonisation of the solar system. That little experiment resulted in the death of over a million people on board. The protomolecule continued to grow, with the deceased reanimated as infected, zombie-like monsters. Hit by a dose of radiation, Holden and Miller barely escaped the station alive...

"They are still being treated for the radiation poisoning they got on Eros," executive producer Naren Shankar tells *SFX*. "The gang is opening the safe they got from Anubis [the stealth torpedo ship owned by Protogen]. Then they realise they have a sample of the protomolecule in their hands. What are they going to do with it? That's where we start with our guys."

Fittingly, the series is also expanding its world this year. "At the very beginning of the premiere, we're bringing in a new perspective, which is the Martians," Shankar continues. "Through Sergeant Bobbie Draper and her Martian marine team, we see the Martian perspective truly for the first time on the show. We had a little taste of them on board the *Donnager* in episode three and four last season, but this is a much more intimate look at Martian culture and how they view the Earth. It's an interesting way to get into [the book] *Caliban's War*."

CORRIDORS OF POWER

SFX is visiting *The Expanse*'s Toronto set in early September. Today cast and crew are busy filming portions of episodes 11 and 12, "Here There Be Dragons" and "The Monster And The Rocket". As we watch, Holden (Steven Strait) and Amos (Wes Chatham) kick open a door and creep down a dark corridor. Guns are cocked and cradled in their arms. Sweeping flashlights survey the area as they advance.

"You didn't even try to stop me from bashing his head in," says Amos.

"You've taught me a lot about futility,"

Holden responds.

"Nah, I think I just beat you to it."



'HIS PHILOSOPHY BECOMES THE MEANS JUSTIFY THE ENDS'

Steven Strait is Jim Holden



X What is Holden's mindset going into this season?

He's driven by guilt and by his feelings of responsibility for what has happened. As he progresses further into this story, the protomolecule almost becomes Holden's whale. He has this Captain Ahab narrative going on. He starts to descend into this myopic madness because he just needs to fix things. He needs to feel like he's in control.

X How are Holden and Miller bouncing off each other?

You have this jaded cop and this naive, idealistic kid. As events transpire, they start to grow closer to each other. Miller starts to finally find things to believe in. Holden has to let go of his beliefs because he's being confronted with the reality of what's going on. The more responsibility he takes on, the more he has to chip away at himself.

X What's the deal with Holden's blue hand in the teaser trailer?

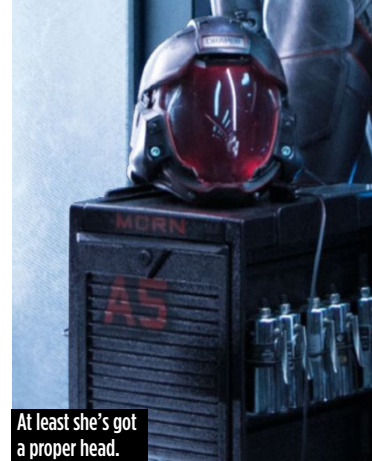
I don't want to give the truth away. He is either infected or it's his own trauma haunting him. As an actor, the use of the trauma and PTSD were major driving forces for how I justified Holden's descent.

X What sequence tops Holden having sex in zero gravity in season one?

There's a scene in episode four where he does something he doesn't want to. You feel for him because he struggles through the whole decision-making process. At the end of the day, he does pull the trigger and that's the turn. That's the shift. His philosophy becomes the means justify the ends.



But, hey, physical strength isn't everything.



At least she's got a proper head.

"The protomolecule turned an asteroid into a missile," notes Holden. "If we can stop it from doing something worse, it's worth cracking one shithead's skull."

Clearly the stakes – and pressure – are higher than ever.

"The problem with mystery conspiracy stories is the longer they go on, the more encrusted everything gets by the weight of the plot," Shankar says. "No, it's not the man behind the curtain. It's the man *behind* behind the curtain.' The only way you can continue that is by widening the scope of the conspiracy. Every time you do that, the plot threads multiply. There was a lot of shadow play in season one. 'No, it's not that guy. No, it's not the stealth ship or the Martians.' It was, 'Not, not, not' because you don't want to give people the answers. What we did at the end of the season was resolve as many of those questions as possible, so that when season two started, we could move the show forward."

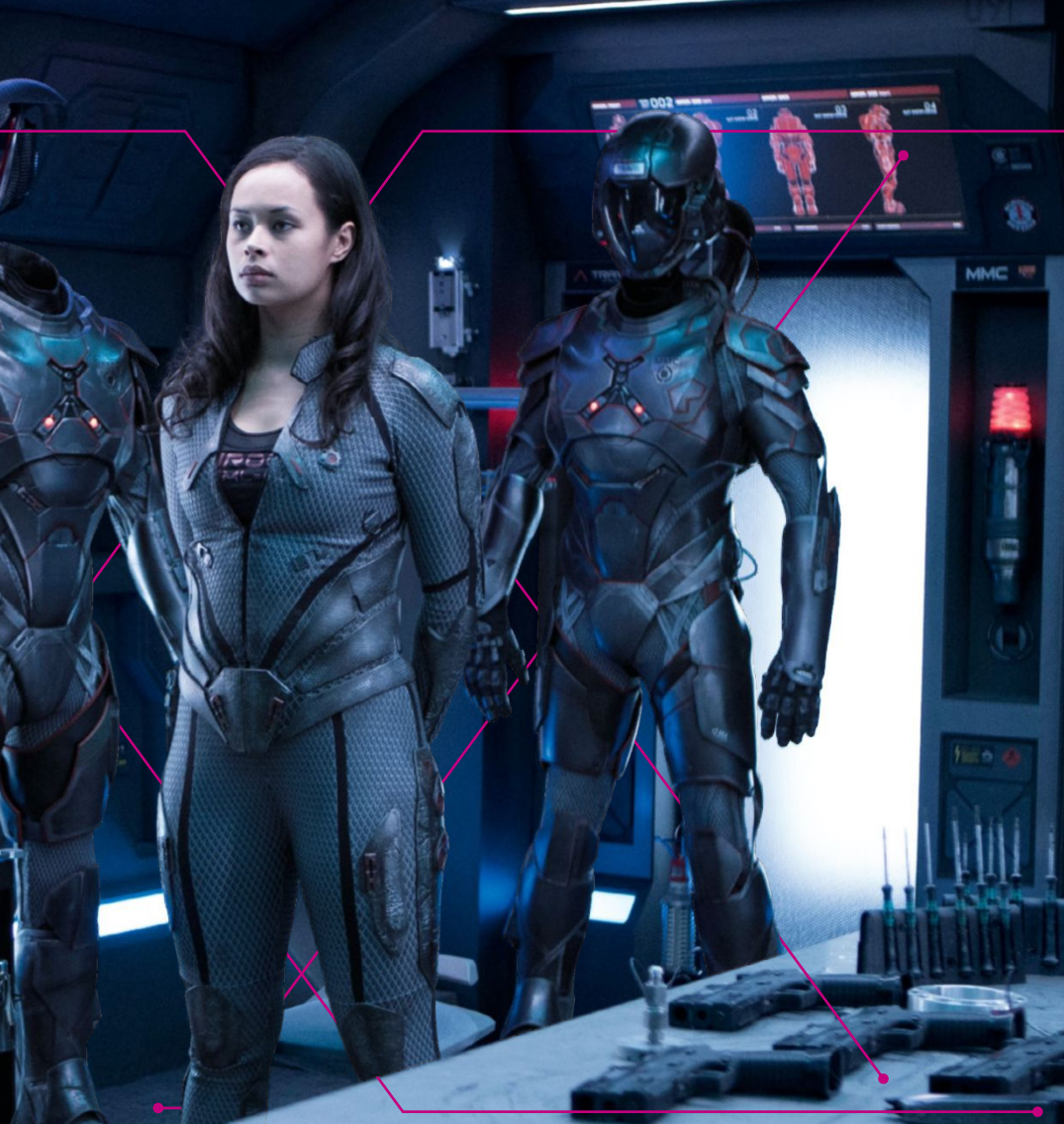
"Instead of playing with conspiracies and mysteries, we're playing in a more accessible action/reaction structure in terms of character and actual plot," Shankar continues. "It's an easier way to understand the story because you don't have to maintain the same contradictory versions of the same event in your head. The

drama doesn't hinge on that. Action reveals character, and character drives action. It's this beautiful circle. That's what we're trying to do this season. At the core of it, we have a great set of characters and situations that reveal more and more about our people and let them learn more about this protomolecule and what's happening with it and seeing what it does."

Although Miller and Holden share the same goal, the pair bicker over tactics and priorities. The two came together under some pretty dire circumstances and, it seems, still haven't particularly warmed to each other...

"Obviously, Holden and Miller helped each other get out of a very bad situation," Shankar

“IT'S TENSE. THERE'S A LOT GOING ON AND STUFF COMES TO A HEAD”



says. “At the end of episode 10 last year, Amos shot Miller’s oldest friend, Sematimba. It’s a complicated dynamic. Without Sematimba, our guys wouldn’t have gotten off Eros. If Amos hadn’t shot him, Holden and Miller would have been stuck there because the gang would have left. It’s very tense. There’s a lot going on and stuff comes to a head. These guys are all getting to know each other, so it’s a new dynamic.”

TAKING SIDES

“Another big arc for season two is people declaring whose side they are on,” Shankar continues. “Holden is from Earth, but trying to stay neutral. He’s trying not to really choose a side. Alex is a Martian and has a Martian ship. Earth and Mars are cruising towards armed combat. Everybody wants this incredibly powerful protomolecule. It’s about picking a side and declaring who you have allegiance to.”

Season two will continue to feature political intrigue, conflicted characters and tough choices. However, Shankar promises plenty of crowd-pleasing explosions and action too, from the moment the premiere kicks off.

“The episode begins with the Martian marines in the midst of a battle. This season has a lot more militaristic flair to it because a big portion of it is this slow movement of battle

between Earth and Mars. We have two superpowers that have never fought before and they are slowly building to the point where they open up and blast each other. On the way there, there’s a lot of shit that happens, which is quite big. There’s going to be a lot of amazing space sequences, which is the show’s signature. There’s a ton of stuff that people are going to be blown away by.”

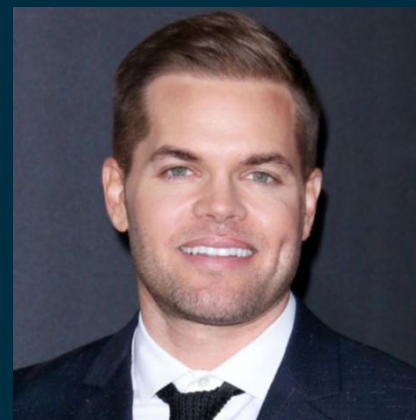
Followers of the novels already have some inkling of where the show is heading, eagerly anticipating that certain key sequences and developments will make it to the small screen. Shankar is only too happy to tease.

“What happens on the Eros Station is amazing and is going to look incredible,” he tells *SFX*. “When you go back to Eros and see what the protomolecule has done, these are beautiful sequences in the book. Executive producers Mark Fergus and Hawk Ostby, who wrote the pilot, have talked about a specific scene that’s at the end of [novel] *Leviathan Wakes* that we did this season. They’ve been fixated on it for three years. Mark will say, ‘That scene is why we wanted to do these books.’ It’s nice to bring that to life.”

The Expanse season two will air on Netflix in the UK, and Syfy in the US from early February.

“HE KEEPS MAKING SOME PRETTY BAD CHOICES”

Wes Chatham is Amos Burton



✕ What will viewers learn about Amos in season two?

You are going to learn about Amos’s past and his point of view. When the circumstances challenge his family and relationships, Amos is forced to be in a situation where he can’t lean on anybody else. He has to start making his own choices and decisions. He keeps making some pretty bad choices, so it’s dealing with the fallout of those and what it means.

✕ What else can audiences expect to see this year?

What I’m most excited about is that you are going to have a strong understanding of what the protomolecule is. Also, Miller and I have a confrontation because I killed his partner in the first season.

✕ Amos comes across as the loose cannon. How does he feel about physical violence and killing?

What’s great about the action sequences is they are very telling about Amos’s way of looking at violence. If people assume that he’s the muscle of the group, that’s not really how it is. He doesn’t have bravado in that way. He doesn’t see himself as a tough guy. Amos is functional in his violence. He’s a survivor. When something is in the way of his family’s survival, he knows something has to be done. It doesn’t weigh on him emotionally like it does on other people. What makes Amos scary is he’s willing to kill and do it in a way that doesn’t disturb his sleep. His violence is quick and to the point.

LEGION



THE OPPOSITE OF X

The creator of *Fargo* is venturing into the world of Marvel mutants. Richard Edwards gets the lowdown on *Legion*, an X-Men TV show like nothing you've seen before

It's nearly 17 years since the X-Men made their live-action debut in Bryan Singer's game-changing 2000 movie. Since then they've appeared in another eight films (to date), and been sequelised, prequelised, spun-off and even broken the fourth wall. It's safe to say, though, that none of their previous screen adventures have been quite like *Legion*.

The new TV series is the brainchild of Noah Hawley, the master showrunner who's successfully riffed on the Coen brothers to make two seasons of the magnificent *Fargo*. And with something like that quirky tale of crime in the US Midwest on your CV, you were hardly likely to go off and simply make an X-take on *Agents Of SHIELD* or *The Flash*...

"Noah's take is certainly an alternate take on the X-Men," explains *Legion* and *Fargo* executive producer John Cameron. "In other words it's unique to him and to his vision. It doesn't feel like an X-Men film, certainly our story doesn't, but it's recognisably the X-Men universe in the sense there are humans with mutant abilities. It has its own look, feel and approach that's quite different from anything we've seen before. We're very enamoured with the reinvention of genre – it's been something that has fascinated Noah for some time – and *Legion* is its own unique take on the universe. In fact I think it's closer to some of the comic arcs that have been published over the years. The famous Chris Claremont arcs on the X-Men certainly inform this on some sort of granular level."

Legion focuses on David Haller, an extremely powerful mutant whose off-the-charts psychic and telekinetic abilities manifest in multiple personalities – a state of being that means he's spent much of his life in mental hospitals. In the comics he's the son of one Professor Xavier, but that doesn't mean *Legion* exists in the X-Men movie continuity that we know – though, equally, it doesn't mean that it doesn't.

"I think that is yet to be discovered [if it's the same universe as the movies], and I mean that in all honesty, I'm not trying to be cute," Cameron teases. "In other words I could easily make the case for [it being the same universe, a parallel universe or something else entirely]. In the arc of the first season, hints are developed and glimpses are shared, but I don't think there's a definitive answer to the question. I think it's subjective to the viewer, so it will be interesting to see their reaction when it airs. Personally I think it's an alternate take on the universe. It's a show with layered realities and different versions of reality that overlap sometimes and create a kind of tapestry of a world. Is it the same universe that the ➔



Dan Stevens as the multi-mutant Legion – who can hopefully swim too.

X-Men of the films inhabit? Perhaps, could be, but this is certainly a different and unique corner of that world.”

As yet, we don’t even know *when Legion* is set. While the first X-Men movie was based in the near future, and *First Class*, *Days Of Future Past* and *Apocalypse* had distinct ’60s, ’70s and ’80s settings, respectively, the sense of time is rather fuzzier for *Legion*. Indeed, the only clues are a slight ’70s/’80s vibe to the fashions and backdrops. “It’s set in its own time,” Cameron teases cryptically. “It’s fun to try and figure that out, but we’ve never come down on a hard number or year, or said it’s present day. It’s unique in the sense you can’t pin it down to a time period.”

One thing that is certain, however, is that in this particular branch of the X-universe(s), mutants are yet to be outed to the wider world. “Some people are aware they exist, but the general public are not,” Cameron confirms. “As with anything else, there are people who are protective of them, and people who are frightened and want to control them.”

DEPARTING NOW

The combination of David Haller’s abilities and his state of mind are perhaps the principal reason why the show promises to be a departure from the usual comic-book adaptation. The trailer teases consciousnesses

“There’s a love story at the heart of *Legion* as there is in most great narratives, I believe”

switching between bodies, the world literally being turned on its head, and even a Bollywood-inspired dance sequence. “It’s grounded in the physics of reality,” says Cameron, “although there are different planes of existence, and dreams, and as we all know anything can happen in a dream, and kind of does in the show.”

Also, much of *Legion* is seen from the perspective of Haller, who may not be an entirely reliable narrator. “I think that’s certainly a good way to put it,” Cameron admits. “In other words this is a young man who’s been told his whole life that he’s mentally ill and he’s struggled with that and the effects of that, but then it becomes clear that perhaps there’s more to it than that – in other words maybe it’s not a question of mental



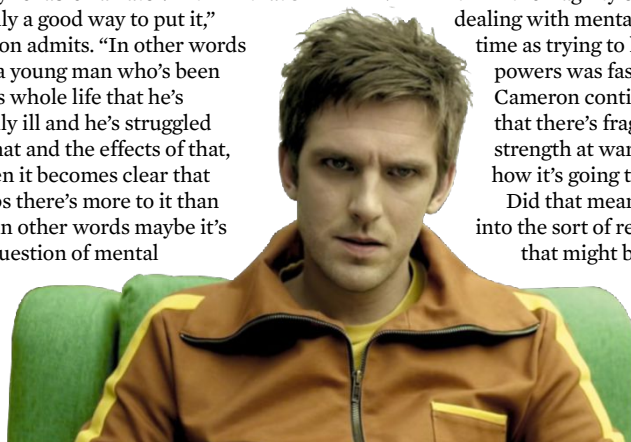
Syd Barrett (Rachel Heller) reaches out to help David.

illness but a question of the extraordinary unknown and untapped abilities that he possesses. Then, of course, the question becomes, that maybe it’s a combination of both.

“It’s a show greatly infused with the idea of memory, and also constructed memory, like is this real, did it happen, or is this something that somebody has projected or constructed for me to believe happened. It’s complex in that regard, and when he’s telling his own story or we’re seeing things through his eyes, we need to try and get to the bottom of what we’re seeing.

“I think the fragility of someone potentially dealing with mental illness at the same time as trying to handle extraordinary powers was fascinating to all of us,” Cameron continues. “There’s a sense that there’s fragility and yet extreme strength at war with each other, and how it’s going to come out.”

Did that mean extensive research into the sort of real-world conditions that might be affecting Haller?





We haven't mucked up our pic – *Legion* goes all topsy turvy.



Could do with Quicksilver to do a bit of a clean-up.

"The show is not particularly about the reality of mental illness – it is a take on a particular person and his particular issues and concerns – but one wants to be sensitive and not purely in it for entertainment value, so yes, a lot of research went into that. Hopefully we have been respectful of the real issue."

NO MORE MR POSH GUY

The man tapped to be Legion/David Haller is Dan Stevens, who's still best known on these shores for paying posh in *Downton Abbey*, but has since showed his versatility with the likes of taut thriller *The Guest*.

"He's a great actor," says Cameron. "This is a multi-multi faceted character, as you can imagine with the idea of the mental illness and the personality, and the idea of extraordinary powers and the question of whether it's real or not real. Dan somehow manages to juggle all that and bring all of those facets into crystalline focus, and he's very human at the same time. There's a sensitivity and humanity that underlines everything that Dan does that makes the character of David – as difficult as his life is, and the situations that he faces are – very approachable and understandable."

Other characters in the mental hospital include Lenny Busker (*Parks And Recreation*'s Aubrey Plaza) and the Pink Floyd referencing Syd Barrett (*Fargo*'s Rachel Heller) – Haller has

a romantic relationship with the latter.

"There's a love story at the heart of this as there is in most great narratives, I believe," says Cameron. "It's pivotal, I think. It's definitely two wounded people who find each other over the course of this story, and it's beautiful and heart-wrenching and has all those great emotional beats that make stories greatly affecting for an audience, I hope."

Another character who seems destined to be key to the narrative is Melanie Bird (Jean Smart, yet another *Fargo* connection). "She's a scientist and a researcher who is one of the people who is aware of the idea of mutant ability in the world, and has great sympathy and a caring approach for people who are afflicted or struggling with their powers. She's kind of a caretaker in a certain way of lost and wounded individuals."

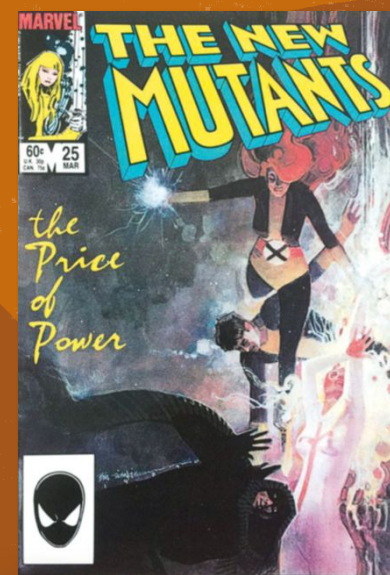
As to whether we'll be seeing David's dad Charles Xavier and other characters from the familiar mutant world, we'll have to wait and see. "I think it's entirely possible. I have to be a little cagey on that in the sense that I think we'll all need to discover that together."

"I think there's an overarching plan," Cameron adds. "We've learned in this first season that it's the type of show that wants to remain open to inspiration. It's going to be a fun journey forward."

Legion debuts on Fox in the UK on 9 February.

Multiple Choice

Comic creators talk Legion



⊗ **First appearing in in 1985's *New Mutants* #25**, Legion was introduced by Chris Claremont and Bill Sienkiewicz during their groundbreaking run on the junior X-book. Described by Claremont as "an amalgam personality", he is the long lost son of Charles Xavier and Holocaust survivor Gabrielle Haller.

"David is a reflection of the personalities that are caught within him," explains Claremont. "When David was a child, his stepfather was slain by a Palestinian terrorist and that catalysed his mutant abilities. In rage and fear, he essentially absorbed the young man attacking him into his own body. From then on, there were two people living inside his head, but over time they come to realise that they are not enemies."

However, Legion didn't come into his own until he became the focus of Simon Spurrier's run on *X-Men Legacy* in 2012. "Marvel suggested making it a solo book based around this character who has previously always been treated as a villain," recalls Spurrier. "From that point it became all about this kid, who had previously always been portrayed as a sympathetic but wildly dangerous problem child, who through no fault of his own could go 'kaboom' at any moment."

Spurrier was determined to make Legion as relatable as possible. "Immediately, you make it about his personal struggle as well as all the outer stuff that has to happen in a superhero comic," he says. "Before you know it, you end up making the story as much about mental illness as it is about flying around and bashing people." **Stephen Jewell**



Out Come

The streets of **GOTHAM** are deadlier than ever...
Tara Bennett talks dark knight, big city with the
people shaping Bruce Wayne's destiny

If you're trying to fight the good fight in Gotham City, it might be easier to just relocate to a new postcode. If we've learned anything from the Bat-prequel show it's that the villains have their claws into the city. Corruption, it seems, is a virus that takes down everyone eventually, even an upstanding, honest guy like Jim Gordon.

Over two seasons, rookie Gotham City Police Department detective Gordon (Ben McKenzie) has been through the wringer, forced to make decisions that have upended his moral compass. Season three finds him alone, working outside Harvey Bullock (Donal Logue)

and the GCPD grid in an attempt to collect the busload of Arkham Asylum escapees loosed upon the streets in the season two finale.

An ever-expanding rogues' gallery is infiltrating the city, from legacy baddies like Fish Mooney (Jada Pinkett Smith) and Oswald "Penguin" Cobblepot (Robin Lord Taylor), to newer problems like Basil "Clayface" Karlo (Brian McNammon) and Professor Hugo Strange (BD Wong). An evolving nest of power-seekers – and monstrous Indian Hill experimental subjects – is on the streets, and that's how executive producer Danny Cannon says they're keeping the series fresh.

"I was really nervous at the end of last year,

spilling monsters out into the city," Cannon admits to *SFX*. "We've never been a 'monster show' but I think with Professor Strange and all his abilities, it organically allowed us to create not CG people, but real people. It's like an old 1920s freak show. As long as we could keep our feet on the ground and make these things believable, I was into it. What it's done for the show now is it goes further into creating a world where a vigilante like Batman is needed because the city is out of control."

And because there is no Batman yet, the city needs a hero like Gordon even more. But it may need to wait while he deals with his own existential issues. "The subtitle of the season is 'Heroes Will Fall' and that's very indicative of where Jim's going this season," actor Ben McKenzie says of his alter ego. "All of the



The Freaks

heroes are flirting with the dark side, and are dipping into it, which is the case for Jim."

The second season finale threw Gordon for a loop and he's still reeling in the season three premiere. "In the finale, he was going to see Lee (Morena Baccarin) and immediately the outcome of that is not good," McKenzie tells *SFX*. "So that snaps him back again, not into a vengeful place but into a place of detachment and an inability to pursue this goal that he's had all along: to clean up the city and do right by this young boy, Bruce Wayne (David Mazouz). So he's detached and alone, just getting along."

"But breaking news: Jim has his own apartment in season three!" McKenzie laughs, amused by Gordon's chronic lack of home base. "He's such a freeloader, always at the lady's place. So he has his own apartment and he's living in a very solitary environment. I imagine the movie *Leon: The Professional*. He's sort of a

bounty hunter, living alone and drinks a lot. He keeps to himself in this dark, Zen-like void."

FACING FACTS

McKenzie says Gordon is about to face some harsh realities about himself. "I think he scares himself at times with how far he's willing to go. He struggles with that and feels enormous guilt over some of the things he's done that he's not proud of, particularly when it destroys a relationship, including the one with Leslie Thompkins. And that's the noble warrior we've always wanted to create here. He's truly a hero in a lawless land and he has no choice but to do some terrible things to do good."

McKenzie says the darker Jim goes the more he ties into the hero the city will get when Bruce finally becomes Batman. His choice to give Gordon a raspier voice is, it seems, a bit of foreshadowing. "I try to drop my register and

imagine myself in a noir or a Western,"

McKenzie explains. "I don't allow that to kill all inflection in him, but he's always been to me the precursor to Batman in our story. He's always been the guy who is trying to keep the wolves at bay and keep the city together before there is a Batman. So there are echoes of Batman's gruffness in there."

Luckily for Bruce and the city, Gordon hasn't totally turned to the dark side, but McKenzie does admit that getting to embody Clayface's interpretation of Gordon last season was a blast. He even hopes to do it again this season. "I had a lot of fun with it and there's always a chance," the actor teases. "The way that Bruno and I talked about [the bad version of Jim Gordon] was that Clayface had only seen Jim tied down, yelling at Hugo Strange, so he assumes he is a loud, angry man. He has no idea if he has any moral fibre. So when Clayface becomes Jim, he's a bully and a jerk and a →



"Don't worry, it's all going to be fine."

misogynist. We like to take the piss out of Gordon's self-seriousness," McKenzie laughs.

"So now that we've established the rough parameters on the show, we can play with them a little bit," the actor continues. "It's not so much body-swapping, but there is an ability to shape-shift in a way, or exchange identities. We also saw this other Bruce Wayne at the end of season two, so that Bruce Wayne will be around for season three. There's a real opportunity to have fun with that kind of stuff. The concepts of identity are so pervasive in comics, but definitely in DC and the Batman comics."

YOUNG TALENT

When it comes to young Master Bruce, Cannon says a huge strength for the series has been David Mazouz's mature interpretation of the complicated youth. "David has done such a good job of this character," the executive producer enthuses. "Bruce Wayne is growing up before our eyes and this year he's going to have to take on a new personality to protect those around him. Too many eyes were on him."

In particular, the eyes of the Court of Owls, a secret society behind Strange's experiments, are very dangerous indeed because they are aware that Bruce, along with Gordon and Lucius Fox (Chris Chalk), are snooping in unwelcome corners of their territory. Because of that, Cannon says, "Bruce has to start saying, 'No, I'm not that Bruce Wayne. I'm actually a brat billionaire.' An irresponsible, spoiled person to deflect the attention he's getting. That's another Batman-esque quality of living two lives. Also he's created a relationship with Lucius, who is starting to realise there is



Definitely deadlier than the male.

“We’re bringing in a whole new crop of villains this season”

Selina Kyle's already got the poses.



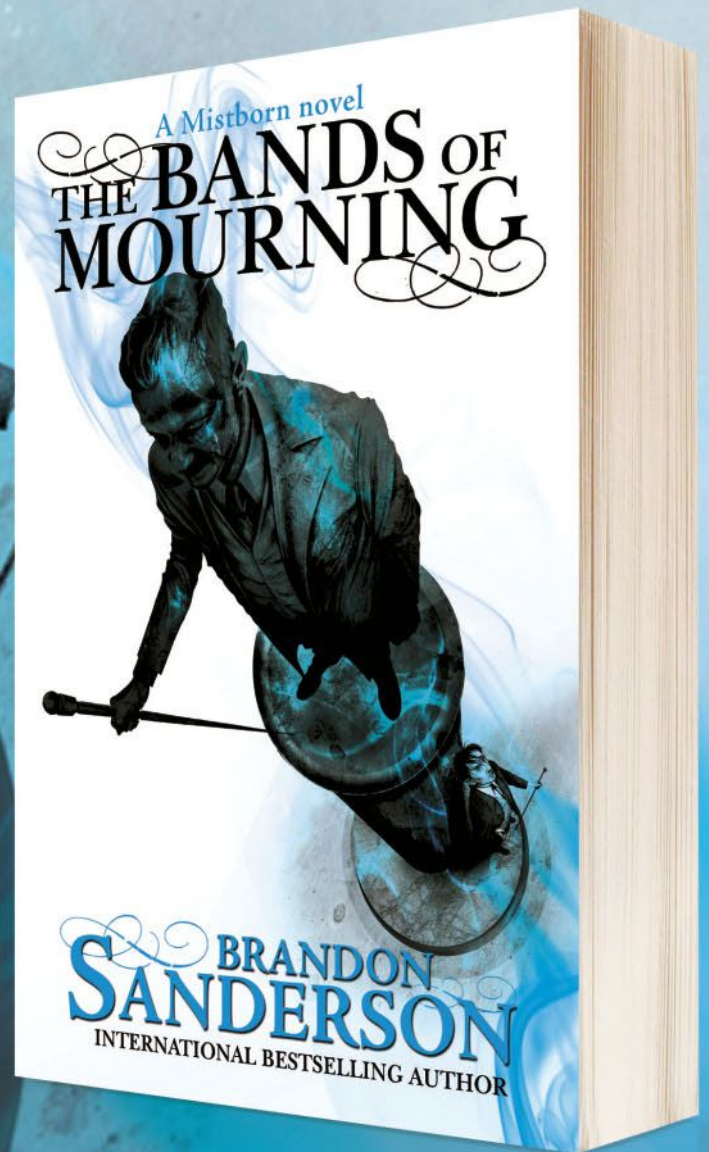
something to this kid that nobody else has. He's incredibly driven so he's going to help him too, even though he warns him where that path to righteousness could lead. We are creating somebody with a team around him now. He can start to fantasise and imagine what it would be like to be his own police force."

Cannon promises some serious female influence on Bruce this season with Ivy Pepper (Clare Foley) and Selina Kyle (Camren Bicondova) in for some major events. Ivy, aka future supervillainess Poison Ivy, will get more of an origin story than she's had in other mediums. "There were a few Ivy origin stories but DC never landed on one, so it was left up to us," Cannon shares. "Because Clare was so young we could go anywhere we wanted to with it, but a transformation happens within that character that is catastrophic and allows us to dig a little deeper. She also interfaces with Bruce Wayne and Selina Kyle a lot more. With everything going on with Selina this year, who digs back into her origin story, something happens there and she will never be the same again. A darkness is happening with Selina's backstory which is propelled by the Ivy story. By the end of the season, the Cat we thought we knew is changed forever."

It sounds like *Gotham*'s typical chaos is being pushed to 11 – and avowed comic book geek McKenzie can't wait to dance with the devils. "We're bringing in a whole new crop of villains, including Mad Hatter who is a personal favourite of mine from the comics. There's a lot of good stuff on the page there for him to chew some scenery!"

Gotham returns to Channel 5 soon.

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GH Protocol



PROTOCOL

The supernatural is blazing its way into **AGENTS OF SHIELD**. Tara Bennett goes undercover as Marvel's spy saga gets weird...



Magic meets science as Ghost Rider comes to *Agents Of SHIELD*.



Quakin' in our boots.

Rejoice, fans of freedom and all that is good – SHIELD is officially back in business.

Recap time, *Eyes Only*: after the covert organisation found itself infiltrated by Hydra in the second season of *Agents Of SHIELD* it was publicly dismantled. Director Coulson (Clark Gregg) and his team created an underground operation to battle Hydra. With the help of a team of genetically modified Inhumans called the Secret Warriors, they succeeded in stamping out Hydra by the end of season three.

Keeping up with the big-screen events of *Captain America: Civil War*, season four welcomes SHIELD back as a public entity, now led by Director Jeffrey Mace (Jason O'Mara), helping to enforce the Sokovia Accords.

That development doesn't sit well for all the agents, especially Daisy Johnson (Chloe Bennet) who has left SHIELD to operate as Quake, protecting targeted Inhumans from watchdog groups trying to wipe them out. "The Inhumans are a metaphor for us in terms of what it's like to be different," executive producer and co-showrunner Jed Whedon tells *SFX*. "So being able to explore some of those themes opens up a lot of story that is very personal to a lot of people for different reasons." →

"HE'S A RIGHTEOUS DUDE"



Gabriel Luna
is Ghost Rider

Your version of Ghost Rider isn't just a flaming skull of vengeance. What makes him different?

» The Ghost Rider is traditionally this lone wolf, vigilante character who does his own thing. While that's still true when Robbie Reyes transforms, he maintains this duty that he has towards his brother, Gabe, which is excellent.

How would you characterise Robbie?

» Robbie is a very serious guy; the strong silent type. He doesn't say any more than he has to. He's a righteous dude in his heart.

What do you admire about Robbie as a character?

» That he just wants to care for his brother. He's been thrust into this position from a very early age. He's been taking care of him since age 13. This beautiful, orphan quality that he has is something I can identify with. My mother was 15 when she had me and my father passed away before I was born. It was just a matter of that character being in the world, and the fact that it happened just in time for me to slip into his shoes is something I'm grateful for.

Outside of flames and leather, what's Robbie's style?

» He's a cool dude who wears his Levi's and hi-top Vans. He has the cool, East LA vibe and is probably a skater dude working on cars with his headphones.

How quickly do Robbie and SHIELD find themselves intertwined?

We take our time. It's a situation where they aren't so much of a team, as heading in the same direction, with the same target.



She's going to twist an ankle in those heels.

"Daisy is very much at the centre of that," adds fellow executive producer and co-showrunner Maurissa Tancharoen. "Now she's gone rogue she is on a mission to protect Inhumans. Placing her at the centre of that helps us to explore the nature of what it means to be an Inhuman in a world that is watching them, and in a world where people might think it's not favourable for them to be in society."

What that leaves is a lot of uncertainty for the agents left behind. As Whedon explains, "In terms of SHIELD, that's bureaucracy, so that will affect how our team operates and will set up some new rules for us to bend, or break." Coulson is now back in the field with Agent May (Ming-Na Wen) and, says Whedon, "When we see him, he's comfortable not being coach anymore."

Tancharoen adds, "It's an adjustment, of course, for him and everyone around him, but there's a weight lifted."

Now the heavy lifting falls on Director Mace's shoulders, but audiences don't get to meet him until the second episode of the season, "Meet The New Boss". Keeping the new guy as enigmatic as possible, Whedon teases, "We can't say a ton about the character, but he has a very different management style than Coulson did. You'll see that contrast instantly." Tancharoen laughs diabolically, "Jason is doing exactly what we imagined..."

Another big storyline continuing this season concerns the Life Model Decoys being developed on the down low by Dr Holden Radcliffe (John Hannah) with a secret assist by Agent Fitz (Iain De Caestecker). Although they're trying to protect field agents from danger, Whedon says the duo's altruistic intentions might not go as intended this season. "When we come back, everyone on our show is focused in different ways, trying to prevent what happened last year from ever happening again. The technology is presented as a solution. In the beginning, LMDs pose an opportunity to create something as a failsafe. Technology is always started with that in mind, but sometimes it's used for other purposes. We'll see down the road where that goes."

RIDING INTO TOWN

Season four also sees the much-hyped introduction of Marvel icon Ghost Rider. A supernatural character first seen in the comics in 1972, every iteration of the flame-skulled entity has preserved the core mythology of a human trading their soul to enact vengeance for some terrible loss in their life. *Agents Of SHIELD* is adapting the Robbie Reyes version of the character – introduced in 2013 as part of the Marvel NOW! initiative – as an Angelino seeking retribution from those who made his beloved brother Gabe paraplegic.

Given *SHIELD* has never dipped into the world of the occult, Whedon says it took a lot of thought to find the right way to bring the character into the show. "In the middle of last year, we started talking about Ghost Rider," he shares. "It's been a challenge in terms of getting it right because we don't want it to not feel like our show. There were a lot of



Jason O'Mara joins the show as new Director Jeffrey Mace.



Agent May enjoys the chance to get back into field work.

“Mace has a very different management style to Coulson”

discussions, and [actor] Gabriel Luna was a key factor in making sure it works.”

“His Robbie is very grounded,” Tancharoen adds. “It’s the first time our show has waded into the realm of the supernatural, even touching on it. We’ve always grounded ourselves in science, so it does raise some questions. It does create a lot of challenges for our team.”

“He opens up a new world that *Doctor Strange* is also opening up for the MCU,” says Whedon. “Marvel’s always done a very good job of introducing science into these elements, or at least the question ‘How is it science?’ And if it isn’t science, then it’s probably something we don’t understand yet. So that’s how we’re going to approach things right off the bat. We are left with a lot of questions that will slowly get answered in the first half of the season.”

The presence of Ghost Rider also allows the series to enter darker territory, a move that aligns it a little closer to the Marvel shows playing on Netflix. Marvel TV boss Jeph Loeb says *Agents Of SHIELD*’s move to a later time slot in the States opened up a new path of storytelling. “The idea that we were moving to 10 o’clock meant that we could select a more mature character and tell stories we might not [at an earlier time],” he says. “I think our fan base is expecting us to deliver with the promise of a Ghost Rider, so this is an opportunity to do that. When people see the

level of special effects for a television series, they will be astonished, so that’s exciting too.”

CHARACTER OPTIONS

And for those worried that TV’s take on Ghost Rider will be a compromised version of the character, Loeb says, “I think at the end of the day, we see ourselves as storytellers. The Marvel publishing universe has been around for 75 years. Take a character like Daredevil who started out as a fun-loving, acrobatic, smart-alec, in some people’s minds like Spider-Man. It wasn’t until Frank Miller came along [that] he was tortured and Catholic, with a background we didn’t know anything about. That turned it into a crime story. So that can happen, provided you stay true to your characters. *SHIELD* has been a lot of things. When [writer/artist] Jim Steranko took over [the] *SHIELD* [comic] he made it more like James Bond rather than a continuation of Nick Fury and his Howling Commandos running around in the present day. He brought to it flying cars, weaponry, and a psychedelic sense, with villains that were women with green hair!”

“So there’s always another way to bend the story and *Agents Of SHIELD* falls into that same category,” he concludes. “When we first started out we were at 8 o’clock, then 9 o’clock and now it’s 10 o’clock. What it’s done for us, at the end of the day, is tell stories that can bring in a character like Ghost Rider but never lose what makes the show work. That is the chemistry between these six, and how different each of them are. We’re a house that just added the coolest garage ever because it’s got a black hellfire car parked in it!”

Agents Of SHIELD returns to E4 in January.

“THERE’S A LOT OF DAMAGE CONTROL”

Ming-Na Wen is Agent May



Do you think May might have wanted the Director job?

» May wants to be out in the field more. As a Director, she would be doing that less and doing more administrative stuff. She’s not a suit.

What does Coulson’s demotion mean for her?

» I think what’s so great about him not being Director is that it will give us an opportunity to be out in the field more, and be on more missions again like we did in season one and season two.

With the MCU Sokovia Accords in the mix, how does that impact SHIELD?

» We’re trying to figure out what our real missions are at this point, whether it’s to tackle the Inhumans, or bring them into the fold. It’s also establishing what *SHIELD* is to the public. There’s a lot of damage control and revitalising that image in the public’s eye. It’s weird how we’re in this real, heightened political arena right now with mayhem and chaos. It’s fun to play in a world where you deal with the governmental world of who these people are versus who are they protecting, or lying to, or befriending. It’s so complicated. We disguise it all in the fantastical world of superpowers but it’s real issues. Are we protecting our citizens, or not?



PER S L I T Y C R I S

YONNA IS

M Night Shyamalan is back with the genre-bending, identity-fracturing **SPLIT**. Joseph McCabe has a therapy appointment...

Cinema has taken audiences from the depths of the ocean to the farthest reaches of the cosmos, but for some creators the true final frontier is a place much closer to home: the human mind.

"If we get stressed our blood pressure goes up," says writer-director M Night Shyamalan. "We buy that, no problem. But isn't it amazing? We just think about it and our blood pressure goes up! Or I give you a pill, tell you it's a cure, and you cure yourself. But it was actually sugar, a placebo. They do it with every study. It's scientific fact but science can't explain it at all. They go, 'Oh yeah, that's true. A percentage of the population cures themselves anyway. Let's go on to our medicine...' We hear of people walking on fire and not getting burnt, or the mom lifting the car off of the child. All those exceptional things that happen, but this is a daily occurrence that happens in every hospital everywhere in the world... 'Here, take this. It cures you...'"

Shyamalan, the son of two physicians, explores the chilling potential of the mind in his new movie *Split*. It's a film that looks at DID (dissociative identity disorder), and asks what might happen if multiple personalities existing in a single person opened the door for a new kind of psyche — one just a little bit more than human.

"I've been fascinated by DID for a long time," Shyamalan tells *SFX* when we chat with him in Los Angeles. "I was living in my parents' house when I heard James Cameron was going to make a movie on DID. Back then it was called multiple personality disorder. I was like, 'Oh my god, that's gonna be amazing, the movie he's gonna make...' I think it was the book *The Minds Of Billy Milligan*, which is a true story [about the first person in US history pardoned for committing a crime due to DID]. I was like, 'Man, I want to grow up and make that movie!'"

"So it's always been part of me. When I



“I’m definitely darker. My darker has gotten darker. It’s a little perverse”

The abducted teenage girls pray to get away from James McAvoy's Kevin.

wrote this character 15 years ago, that was part of it. Ever since then, researching and getting to know how the child's brain works in development and what happens when trauma happens to you when you're a child; and what happens to the ability of the brain... It's an absolutely fascinating field."

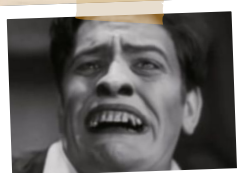
With a screenplay that required its lead actor to embody several entirely different personalities, from the most innocent to the most corrupt, Shyamalan called on James McAvoy, who'd

taken a very different cinematic head trip as Professor Charles Xavier in the X-Men movies.

"We put together a hypothetical list of who could do this. As soon as you start doing that there's hardly anyone. It's like, who could do the boy and 'The Beast'? Who could do that and not have you think it was silly? I met James by chance for the first time last year. We started talking and I was like, 'God, this guy could do it. This is *him*.' Then I heard he was available, so I gave him the script. He immediately emailed

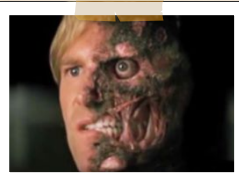
CASE STUDIES

Five — at least — of pop culture's greatest multiple personalities



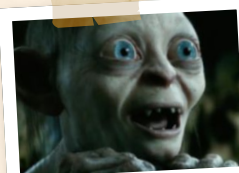
DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE

In exploring man's potential for both good and evil, Victorian author Robert Louis Stevenson put a hero and villain in the same body and paved the way for countless creators to follow.



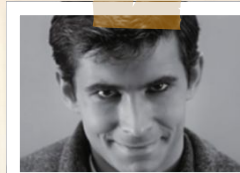
TWO-FACE

Like Jekyll and Hyde, the most famous split personality in comic books (Harvey Dent, Batman's friend turned enemy) embodies humanity's dual nature; and takes things further by examining the tragic role played by chance.



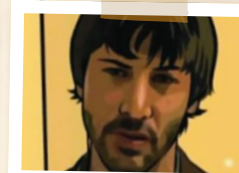
GOLLUM

The biggest war fought in JRR Tolkien's epic *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy isn't waged between armies, but rather inside the tortured mind of Sméagol, a Hobbit corrupted by his precious, the One Ring.



NORMAN BATES

The most famous serial killer in pop culture is the protagonist/antagonist of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, a living testament to the adage that "A boy's best friend is his mother" — even when a boy is his mother.



BOB ARCTOR/AGENT FRED

The protagonist of Philip K. Dick's *A Scanner Darkly*, set in a dystopian future, is, in the author's typical mind-twisting fashion, both a drug user and the narcotics officer sent to spy on him and his friends.



Multiple personalities, each one with no hair...



Therapy sessions: not always successful.

back all these curse words: 'Holy fuck! What the fuck was that? That's fucked up!' I was like, 'Great, let's try it.'

LIGHT FADING

Split is produced by indie horror mogul Jason Blum through his Blumhouse Studios. And as with Shyamalan's 2004 movie *The Village*, *Split* finds the director taking an even darker route than he did in early hits *The Sixth Sense* and *Unbreakable*. That much is evident from *Split*'s set-up, in which McAvoy's personas (known as "The Horde") kidnap and imprison three teenage girls.

"I'm definitely darker," he admits to *SFX*. "My darker has gotten darker. It's a little perverse, and I'm okay with that inappropriate perverseness. I'm not sure if 10, 15 years ago I would have written a kid getting smothered with a diaper, and all that stuff in *The Visit*, or the things that go on in *Split*. But I also feel okay doing that. Because I feel like in making smaller movies I'm allowed to push the boundaries a little bit."

Shyamalan turned to fresh talent to help him realise his vision.

"Being able to go, 'Wow, I saw *True Detective* and I love the production design. That's who I'm going to hire to do my first movie' or 'I thought the cinematography in *It Follows* was amazing. Who is that kid? I'm gonna go meet him.' I met [Mike Gioulakis] and he had really only done *It Follows* before. He was so quiet, and I was like, 'What did you say?' '*Unbreakable*'s my favourite movie.' I'm like, 'You're hired. I'll send you the script. You'll know why.' Then the composer is from *The Jinx*, which is the documentary on HBO [about accused murderer Robert Durst]. He'd never done a movie. I love those things. I loved *True*

Detective, I loved *It Follows*, I loved *The Jinx*. Those are some of my favourite storytelling that went on in the last four years. So the fact that I can join them all together..."

Shyamalan smiles. "I feel like I'm getting a bargain, because these guys are all newbies and they'll kill themselves. The DP, he lived at my house for a month before we shot, for nothing, to storyboard everyday with me. I know Universal bought it and all that stuff, but because it's my money... You're trying harder. If it's your pizza shop, you get up earlier. You come in earlier. You wipe the floors. It's yours! It means that much more."

Audiences will have to wait to see just how weird *Split* gets. Like most of Shyamalan's films it's packed with a twist or two that we won't reveal here. Let's just say that *Split*, perhaps more than any of his films, blends genres to hint at a broader universe of possibilities than first present themselves.

"I'm excited for that. I'm not being honest about what you're watching until *that* scene, when you learn you are actually watching something else. It changes genres. You thought you were watching a kidnapping movie. That changes, and you're watching what you think is a supernatural science movie. Then that changes and you learn what you actually saw was... Well, the genre changes at the end."

As for whether or not *Split*'s many possibilities could, unlike Shyamalan's other films, result in a sequel...

"Expectations are hard for me," he admits. "The more expectations, the more limitations I have in format and how I'm telling a story. That becomes uninteresting to me."

He smiles again. "But I do have a thought about one last thing in this story..." ●

Split opens on 20 January.

HEAD MASTER

James McAvoy on his challenging role(s)



What led you to sign on for *Split*?

➔ I'm not really strategic. I never try to engineer my career. All I do is read the script; and if I like it and feel like it's going to be a challenge or it's going to be exciting or it's going to push an audience around and be a slightly strange experience for the audience I'll respond to it. I like it when something is strange, and is a little bit challenging for the audience as well as the actor. This was definitely a challenge for me... "Alright, I'm not really playing one person. I'm playing nine people. So I just have to do my job nine times."

Were you a Shyamalan fan?

➔ I'm a fan of lots of Night's work. *Unbreakable* came out 15 years ago, right about the same time the first X-Men film came out. That film's sort of credited with helping to kickstart the newer wave of what we're experiencing now with all these superhero movies. Yet those two movies are opposite ends of how you deal with villains and heroes. This film is like that as well. [Anya Taylor-Joy's] Casey is an absolutely normal indie movie hero, and Kevin and the Horde are an entirely sort of indie depiction of supervillains.

Talking of X-Men: where would you like to see Charles Xavier go next?

➔ I seem to remember when I was a kid reading a comic book of the X-Men where Charles suffers from split personality! It wasn't called DID back then, but there's more than one entity in him. I quite like the idea of that, so I'd be up for that. I'd be up for doing lots of different things with Charles. We just need to wait and see what the studio and [producer] Simon Kinberg are planning next.

REX (C)

Brought



To Book

STEPHEN BAXTER

The SF luminary tells us about his new sequel to *War Of The Worlds*

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Photography by Joe Branstom

This year marks 120 years since HG Wells's *The War Of The Worlds* was first serialised in *Pearson's Magazine*. As visions of tripods marauding across south-east England have subsequently embedded themselves not just in the collective consciousness of SF fans but the wider world, it's a story that sits deep in our shared culture.

All of which means that, even though Wells left plenty of scope for the story to be continued, it would take a brave man indeed to write a sequel. Step forward Stephen Baxter, whose *Massacre Of Mankind*, authorised by the HG Wells Estate, imagines what happens when the Red Planet invaders return in an alternate-history 1920s. "You have the Martians landing in the jazz age," says Baxter, with some satisfaction. "And I've got to say there's a rather ace cover, Art deco Martians attacking a kind of Empire State Building, it looks great."

It does indeed. More importantly, though, it's a sequel that captures the spirit of Wells without being cowed by it. Preparing to write the book, says Baxter, he read a lot of F Scott Fitzgerald, a way "to move on from the 1897 voice of Wells, because his style evolved as well".

FOLLOWING THE GREATS

Baxter, it's worth noting, has a clearer sense of Wells's voice than most. Not only did he previously write *The Time Ships* (1995), a sequel to *The Time Machine*, but he's a vice-president of the HG Wells Society. Much as he did when collaborating with Alastair Reynolds on *The Medusa Chronicles*, a continuation of Arthur C Clarke's novella *A Meeting With Medusa*, he went looking for clues via a close reading of *War Of The Worlds*.

"Wells repeatedly wrote books about some great smash-up happening to mankind," says Baxter, touching on Wells's socialist-infused utopianism, "and we all emerge from the wreckage having suddenly become sane. 'What fools we were! Let's build a world government!' In *The Days Of The Comet* [1906] was one. At the end of *The War Of The Worlds*, the narrator is looking for the 'commonweal of mankind' that might emerge from the Martian attack."

For Baxter, this idea didn't ring true. "I really didn't think that was going to happen," he says. "The Martian incident, devastating and conceptually horrifying as it was, was just a local incident in the south of England. It would be massive news at the time, but it would soon fade. From Berlin, the Kaiser would still be nurturing his expansionist ambitions. And from the States, it'd be like a volcano in Yorkshire. It'd be a sensation for a while, but like a local natural disaster."

Accordingly, *Massacre Of Mankind* outlines a world history that largely follows the contours of our own timeline, albeit with significant departures. Working from the idea the original landings took place in 1907, for example, Baxter shows World War I as excluding an understandably otherwise distracted Great Britain, which doesn't fight alongside France.

Nevertheless, Baxter certainly shows us war zones. When the Martians return, first again to England, the topography is transformed to be far more terrible – and quite literally alien – than the shell-pocked trench landscape of the western front.

WAR-TORN LANDS

Or perhaps World War II might be a more apposite comparison. Researching his alternate history novel *Weaver*, which portrays an England occupied by the Nazis, Baxter again and again came across references to Wells, references inspired by the way the conflict affected civilians so profoundly. "I think he must have been a kind of comfort, at least somebody had imagined all this, it wasn't just out of the blue," says Baxter. "This visionary from the past was able to foresee it, even if he wasn't able to offer any solutions."

Wells himself, though, didn't necessarily value his ability to describe such scenes as highly as he might have done. In Baxter's estimation, he was both "a very clear-thinking kind of chap, with a strange, detached perspective" and a man with a strong visual imagination, even "cinematic" in the way he would zoom in and zoom out of scenes, or have "one scene dissolving into another". When the latter strength was to the fore, says Baxter, Wells's writing was better.

"Later in life he became more didactic," he says. "After 1901, 1902, he wanted to be a finer writer. He put aside his visual imagination to become more verbal, which was not a good move really. You don't deny your strength."

It's not a mistake Baxter intends to make as he approaches his 60th birthday. Instead, he takes inspiration from Arthur C Clarke, with whom he co-wrote. "He didn't have an easy old age with his post-polio syndrome, but I worked with him when he was in his eighties and he was still full of ideas, full of enthusiasm, always looking to the next project, never wanting to rest on his laurels, always moving forward and always keeping up with the latest research in space science," says Baxter. "That's what I want to be when I grow up." ●

The Massacre Of Mankind is out on 19 January. Read more from Baxter in SFX's *Complete Sci-Fi Handbook*, out now.

Biodata

Occupation

→ Novelist

Born

→ 13 November 1957

From

→ Liverpool

Greatest Hits

→ Baxter's previous Wells sequel, *The Time Ships*, won the BSFA Award, the Sidewise Award for Alternate History, the John W Campbell Award and the Philip K Dick Award.

Random Fact

→ The next two books in Baxter's long-running *Xeelee* sequence (*Xeelee*:

Vengeance is due in June) will finally reveal aliens that have previously been offstage.





BROUGHT TO BOOK
STEPHEN BAXTER

“YOU HAVE
THE MARTIANS
LANDING IN
THE JAZZ AGE”



It is happening again...

Mark Frost tells Will Salmon how his new book
THE SECRET HISTORY OF TWIN PEAKS
explores the past – and the future – of the
iconic mystery show...



M

ark Frost is worried. Not about the new season of

Twin Peaks, you understand. He describes returning to the show he co-created in 1990 with Emperor of Weird David Lynch as “a really special experience – we had so much fun making it and it was so great to reunite with the old cast and crew, and to revisit some of the locations.”

No, Mark Frost is worried about Donald Trump and the path the world appears to be taking right now. “We seem to live in a world of competing sets of facts,” he sighs when *SFX* catches up with him, a few days after that fateful election. “There was a moment – I think it was during the Republican Convention – when Newt Gingrich was being interviewed by someone who said, ‘Factually, what you’re saying is wrong.’ I can’t quote it literally, but Gingrich replied, ‘Well, we *feel* that it’s true’. There’s very little you can do to prevent people from having their own set of facts, except to just say, ‘Look – science!’ But that doesn’t go down very well, so what are you going to do?”

Frost knows his history – how patterns recur, and how secret forces impact on the lives of everyone from FBI agents to the working class inhabitants of isolated mountain towns – something that is immediately clear when reading *The Secret History Of Twin Peaks*. This lavish hardback marks the first official return to the fictional town since 1992’s none-more-dark movie, *Fire Walk With Me*. No casually tossed off tie-in, it’s a book steeped in history, mystery, politics and folklore, kicking off in 1805 with explorers Lewis and Clark, taking in World War II, Vietnam, “foo fighters” and Thelema, and ending roughly where the original series finished.

The book began to take shape while Frost and Lynch were deep in the process of writing the new episodes. “I knew once we started writing the series in earnest that I’d be doing the book. We’d had some success with publishing the first time around [with *The Secret Diary Of Laura Palmer* and *The Autobiography Of FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper*] and since then I’ve gotten my publishing career under way. I was really looking forward to revisiting the town and the characters. So once I knew we were going to make the show I thought it would be a perfect way to enrich that experience.”

Lynch, for his part, remained hands-off. “I worked on it alone. I was writing it while David was directing the series – he was a little bit preoccupied! We wrote the episodes together,



and then he went into full prep mode and directing, and did a phenomenal job on a brutal schedule. While that was happening I turned my hand to the book.”

Unusually for a book described on the cover as simply “a novel”, *The Secret History* takes the form of a dossier compiled by a nameless narrator and an equally elusive FBI agent – pointedly not Dale Cooper – reviewing the material. “The function dictated the form,” says Frost. “It came down to finding a form that would accommodate the needs of the material. The show spoke with so many voices and this format gives everyone the chance to speak.” He describes the experience of writing so many different characters over a span of nearly 200 years as, “like spinning plates. With drama you’re always trying to get into the heads of different people, but here it was a really deep dive. But I found it invigorating. How often do you get a chance to revisit characters after this long?”

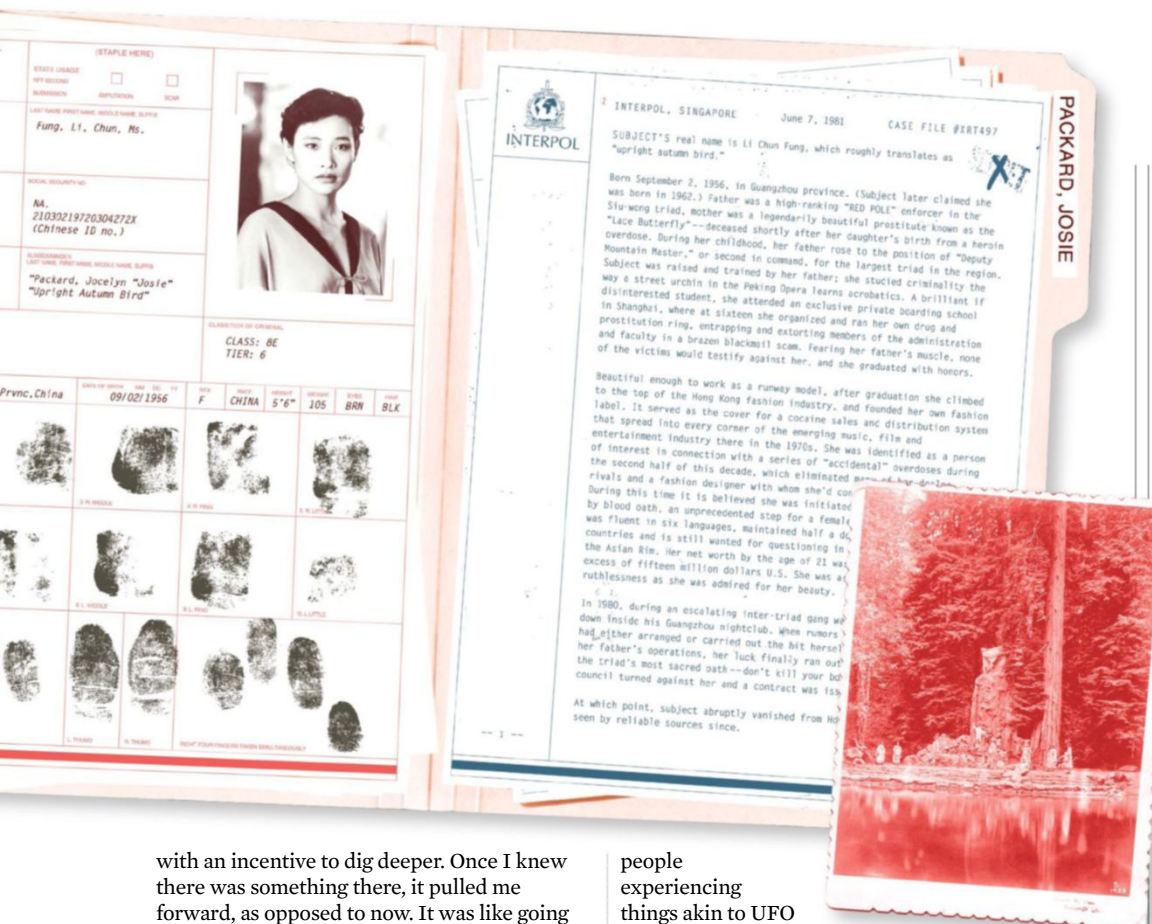
Also different is the book’s inclusion of real-life historical figures – some of whom stretch credulity, but are, in fact, real. Forget Aleister Crowley and L Ron Hubbard (although both play a part) – what about Jack Parsons? The genius rocket scientist who helped shape NASA and was also

a practising occultist sounds like the stuff of fiction, but was very real. “It’s a cliché, but truth really is stranger than fiction,” insists Frost, when we accuse him of tampering with the history books to come up with such an unlikely figure. “Our own lives overlap with so many other people. So why not just throw them all in the same pot and make a meal out of it?”

MYSTERY & MAGICK

It’s not, however, a 362-page discourse on what happened to the Log Lady’s husband or how that fish got in Pete’s percolator. There are fan-pleasing moments, but predominantly the book is concerned with mystery, evoking and sustaining it. Some of the threads are clearly linked to the supernatural elements that run through the show (there are allusions to the Black and White Lodges, the green ring that shows up throughout *Fire Walk With Me* and, of course, owls not being what they seem) but the book is more concerned with folding *Twin Peaks* into the mythology of our real world.

“Mysteries demanded harder work from you then,” says Frost, admitting that there’s a degree of nostalgia for the pre-Google age that the book and the original series takes place in. “It always provided me



PACKARD, JOSIE



STILL A MYSTERY

There are two big questions that *The Secret History* pointedly doesn't answer...

So, what did happen to Coop when he returned from the Black Lodge? And precisely how is Annie?

▲ The former question will be answered, of course, in the TV show. Kyle MacLachlan was the first person announced as having been cast in the new series, and it's impossible to imagine *Twin Peaks* without Agent Cooper. Whether he's good or bad – or some combination of the two – is the big question.

But what of Annie Blackburn, first introduced in season two and last seen looking seriously worse for wear after Windom Earle dragged her to the Black Lodge? Actress Heather Graham is absent from the new season's sprawling cast list and the character doesn't appear in the book. Will we ever find out what became of her? "All of the speculation will *probably* prove productive – in ways I obviously can't talk about," teases Frost. "There's very little that happens in the book that doesn't have a reason, I'll put it that way." Does he get asked, "How's Annie?" a lot? "I got a fair amount when I was on the road with the book. It's not the only question people are interested in, but that's definitely one of the catchphrases associated with the show."

with an incentive to dig deeper. Once I knew there was something there, it pulled me forward, as opposed to now. It was like going spelunking on your own, with a miner's hat and a flashlight. Now – it's almost too easy. And, as we've seen, what it's given rise to is a universe where whole sections of our population are believing an alternate set of facts. I think life was a little simpler when there was more agreement on the basic truths of what was around us. We're sailing into pretty stormy waters, I think."

Perhaps the biggest mystery explored in the book is the UFO phenomenon. Previously only teased in the TV series, it turns out to have played a large part in the lives of many of Twin Peaks's inhabitants. "I guess I would say I'm an interested observer," says Frost. "Did you see the second series of *Fargo*? It's based, in part, on a series of very intense sightings that happened in Minnesota, about '76/'77. I was making documentaries for the local PBS station. When one of them happened close to Minneapolis, I grabbed a camera crew and went down and interviewed a bunch of the witnesses. I've never had a direct experience of any of this, but that was close enough, and it certainly made me think: where there's smoke, there's fire, and we don't know what the fire is."

But fans shouldn't be concerned about the book treading too much on *The X-Files*'s toes. *The Secret History* suggests that its science fictional and spiritual elements are, in fact, all part of the same phenomena. "As you dig into this stuff, you realise there's a long history of

people experiencing things akin to UFO encounters, that goes back thousands of years. It takes you a little out of sci-fi and almost into pre-Columbian, shamanistic mythology. I thought that was pretty fascinating. I'm a big history buff. And I've been around long enough to have heard a little about a lot of different things. I cast this net out to find what was going to fit thematically and these were some of the things that popped up. They reflect back to not only what we did in the old series, but I think you'll find eventually they give you some hints about where we might be going next... Without dwelling too long on that, it all blended together and seemed to be a good fit."

With the show's return drawing ever-nearer, and with virtually nothing yet known about what it will be about or even what form it might take, fans have been scouring *The Secret History* for new information. It must feel like 1990 again, we suggest, when only Frost, Lynch and a handful of others knew the answers. "There's a definite recall of that feeling, yeah. During the height of it, it felt like you had

access to the nuclear codes or something. It was a little daunting. It made you wary of talking to strangers. 'Maybe this person is going to really want to know something more than I can resist telling them. I just hope it doesn't involve pliers and a car battery!'"

The Secret History Of Twin Peaks is out now from Macmillan.



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SCENE



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2017

edited by Ian Berriman

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ROGUE ONE

Rebel With A Cause

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→ Does Patrick Ness's YA spin-off make up for 2016's lack of *Doctor Who*?



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→ The Martians are back in Stephen Baxter's *War Of The Worlds* sequel.

→ RATINGS EXPLAINED ★★★★★ SUPERB ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★★★ AVERAGE ★★★★★ POOR ★★★★★ TERRIBLE

ROGUE ONE

A Matter Of Life And Death Star

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 134 minutes

► Director Gareth Edwards

► Cast Felicity Jones, Diego Luna, Ben Mendelsohn, Mads Mikkelsen, Alan Tudyk, Forest Whitaker

❖ *The Force Awakens* was the easy bit. If Disney is really going to make the most of its \$4 billion-plus investment in *Star Wars*, it needs to make blockbuster movies away from the safety blanket of Han, Leia, Luke and the old Skywalker family drama. So *Rogue One* – a “how we stole the plans to the Death Star” war movie focused on an entirely new group of characters – could well be the most important movie the post-George Lucasfilm ever makes.

But if there was ever a question whether a *Star Wars* movie could work away from the main saga, *Rogue One* answers it emphatically. It's an exhilarating companion piece to the original trilogy, simultaneously reverent to the source material while feeling like no *Star Wars* movie that's come before it – the sort of story usually told in an expanded universe novel, given the full

blockbuster treatment. It's bold, dark, moving, spectacular and sometimes very funny – and it's as radical as *The Force Awakens* was comfortingly familiar.

As soon as the famous “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...” fades, it's clear we're in for a new kind of adventure and excitement. There's no fanfare, no opening crawl, in their place a beautiful shot of an Imperial shuttle flying through a planet's ring system, and a prologue sequence about the Ersos – a family who are to the Death Star as the Skywalkers are to the Empire. For the first time ever we get captions on screen to tell us (most of) the locations we're visiting. And director Gareth Edwards by and large keeps his camera mobile, handheld, at eye level to catch the full impact of the many explosions – quite a departure from the epic sweeps of the *Episodes*.

It's still unmistakably *Star Wars*, however. The sights, sounds and even the music – new composer Michael Giacchino brings something new to the table while still being faithful to John Williams – are all reassuringly



familiar. The buttons on the Death Star's control panels have the tactile retro clunk of the originals, the Rebels keep their '70s moustaches, and for hardcore fans, there are plenty of nods and in-jokes to what's come before. Luckily few come at the expense of the story.

Of course, where *Rogue One* is heading has been set in stone since the original movie told us that Rebel spies had stolen secret Death Star plans, but that's never a problem – the journey is much more important than the destination. While there are some slight pacing issues in the first half

“It's a triumph for both the Rebels and Lucasfilm”

as the ragtag team of Rebels coalesces, everything explodes into life in a final act as brilliant as anything in the history of *Star Wars* – the closer you get to the beginning of *A New Hope*, the more captivating it gets. It's like





"Halt!" shouted airport security.

everything you ever dreamed could be in an original trilogy action sequence and more, with old-school Empire and Rebel Alliance hardware realised by 21st century ILM. Like JJ Abrams, Edwards gets *Star Wars* and packs the movie with beautiful visuals that will make any fan want to punch the air in delight. There are few things in life more satisfying than watching a squadron of classic X-Wings swooping into battle.

But *Rogue One* is also the movie that puts the *Wars* in *Star Wars* – *Saving Private Ryan* seems nearly as much of an influence as

A New Hope. It's the story of ordinary people forced to do questionable things for the greater good – they don't have any sorcerer's ways to fall back on, so for the first time we see the actual human (and alien) cost of the Rebels' fight against the Empire; the grunts who'd usually be out of focus in the background finally given faces. Because the central characters are unknown (though mostly memorable, with snarky droid K-2SO the standout), it gives their predicament an urgency we've not seen before. It's no spoiler to say that not all of them make it out alive, and

remarkably, *Rogue One* packs a similar emotional punch to Han Solo taking a lightsaber to the guts. (The movie's one star "face", Darth Vader, is used sparingly, but brilliantly.)

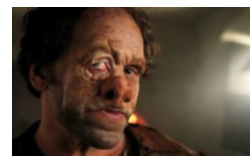
So *Rogue One* is a triumph for both the Rebels and Lucasfilm. We can't wait to see where *Episode VIII* will go, but ironically a movie that delves right back into *Star Wars* history while reinventing what the franchise can be might just hold the key to its long-term future... **Richard Edwards**

i George Lucas had some simple advice for Gareth Edwards when he visited the *Rogue One* set: "Don't screw it up."

EASTER EGGS

SPOLIER WARNING!

Bits of lore you may have missed



• Dr Evazan cameos to tell Jyn, "You just watch yourself," pre-empting what he says to Luke Skywalker in the Mos Eisley Cantina. (He must have got off Jedha pretty sharpish to avoid the Death Star blast...)

• The Kyber crystals used to power the Death Star also fuel lightsabers.

• The Whills, of which Chirrut and Baze are guardians on Jedha, were referenced as far back as George Lucas's early treatments for the original movie.



• We'd be surprised if the lava planet where Krennic meets Vader isn't Mustafar, site of Anakin's duel with Obi-Wan. In the expanded universe, both Vader and the Emperor use the planet for Dark Side meditation – and the interrogation of Jedi.

• Red Leader (Garven Dreis) and Gold Leader (Jon Vander) are digitally recreated from *A New Hope*. The doomed pre-Luke Red Five also appears.

• A ship that looks like *Star Wars Rebels'* Ghost is in the final battle.



CINEMA



The safe cracked, John and Julie finally discovered the chocolate biscuits stash.

PASSENGERS

Waking Up Is Hard To Do

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 116 minutes

► Director Morten Tyldum

► Cast Jennifer Lawrence, Chris Pratt, Michael Sheen, Laurence Fishburne

❖ In 2007, Jon Spaihts's script for *Passengers* was named one of Hollywood's Hottest Unproduced Screenplays. It bounced around in development hell for years; for a while it seemed as though Keanu Reeves was going to produce it as a relatively low-budget drama (he was set to star opposite Emily Blunt), but it didn't pan out. Eventually *The Imitation Game* director Morten Tyldum bit the bullet, took the risk and brought us this version: a mega-budget sci-fi action extravaganza that's also, somewhat paradoxically, a charming romance starring Jennifer Lawrence and Chris Pratt, two of the hottest names in Hollywood today.

We say "paradoxically" because, as a morality tale for future generations, *Passengers* could have just as easily have been a devastatingly powerful *Twilight Zone* story or (with a few tweaks)

a brutally cynical episode of *Black Mirror*. Pratt's humble colonist Jim wakes up from stasis after a 120-year journey to another planet to establish a new home, only to discover that it's only been 30 years, he still has 90 to go, and there's no way to go back to sleep again. Sure, he can wander the corridors of the spaceship and enjoy its ultra-swish perks: the place has everything from the best swimming pool in space that you will ever see, to a bar with an android barman (Michael Sheen) who's nice enough, but no substitute for a real human. Or, he can slowly go mad from loneliness and find himself staring at his sleeping fellow passengers, wondering whether to wake them



"And do you have *The Shining* on DVD?"

up just so he doesn't spend the rest of his natural life alone.

No prizes for guessing what Jim does once he sees Lawrence's author, Aurora, snoozing away in her pod. And this is where *Passengers* comes into its own: the moral ambiguities and repercussions of this act are sickening, and while the two do fall in love (this is a Hollywood movie, after all), there are plenty of shoes waiting to drop.

The performances are realistic and compelling, while the effects work and production design are flawless on all counts (again, can we stress that this film has the best swimming pool in space you will ever see?). *Passengers* ramps up the action in a gigantic third-act setpiece which is satisfyingly tense, but frankly, underneath all the CGI this is nothing more than a conventional love story with a dark twist. If this had actually been an episode of *Black Mirror*, it would probably have been every inch as effective – not to mention considerably cheaper. Still, you can't fault the visuals here – or its big-name stars – and you'll definitely find yourself wondering what you'd do in Jim's Robinson Crusoe-esque situation. You might not like the answer... **Jayne Nelson**

i The voice of the starship Avalon is Emma Clarke, who also provides the "Mind the gap" announcements on the Tube.

ALSO+OUT

26 DECEMBER

MONSTER TRUCKS

A tentacular creature acts as the engine for a high school kid's truck in this CGI/live-action blend.



1 JANUARY

ASSASSIN'S CREED

Michael Fassbender and Marion Cotillard star in this adaptation of the smash hit Ubisoft videogames, about a crack assassin in 15th century Spain.

13 JANUARY

THE BYE BYE MAN

College students take on a supernatural entity that causes killing sprees by possessing people in this horror thriller.

UNDERWORLD: BLOOD WARS

The sequel to 2012's *Underworld: Awakening* sees Kate Beckinsale's Selene trying to end the war between Lycans and Vampires. *Sherlock's* Lara Pulver plays the villain.

25 JANUARY

GHOST IN THE SHELL

Ahead of the Scarlett Johansson-starring remake, the classic 1995 anime film gets a one-night-only reissue – head to <http://gitsmovie.co.uk> to find the nearest screening to you.

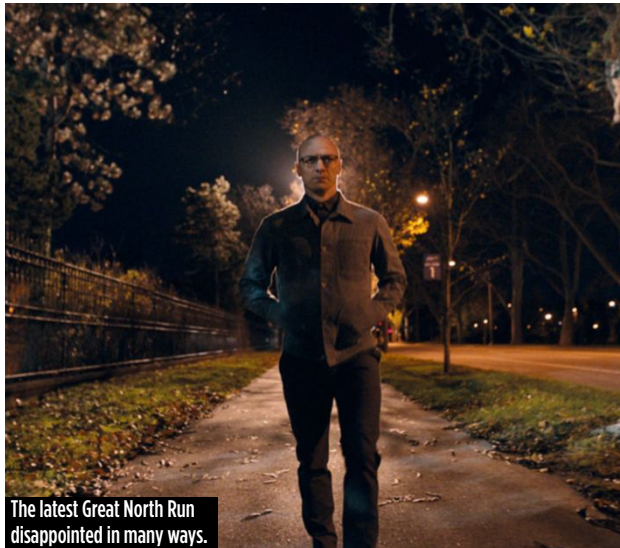
27 JANUARY

THE WHITE KING

A boy vows to find his imprisoned father in this near-future dystopia (reviewed on p103) – it has a limited theatrical release ahead of its DVD debut.



Reviews



The latest Great North Run disappointed in many ways.

SPLIT

Multiple McAvoy

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 20 JANUARY**

15 | 117 minutes

▶ Director M Night Shyamalan

▶ Cast James McAvoy, Betty Buckley,

Anya Taylor-Joy

◆ **Let's be honest; among the** categories of film that jaded filmgoers have sworn never to try again, "movies by M Night Shyamalan" ranks high nowadays, as do "psycho thrillers in which the psycho has a split personality". *Split* is both, but here's the real shock twist: it's good (and in ways that *SFX* readers will appreciate...).

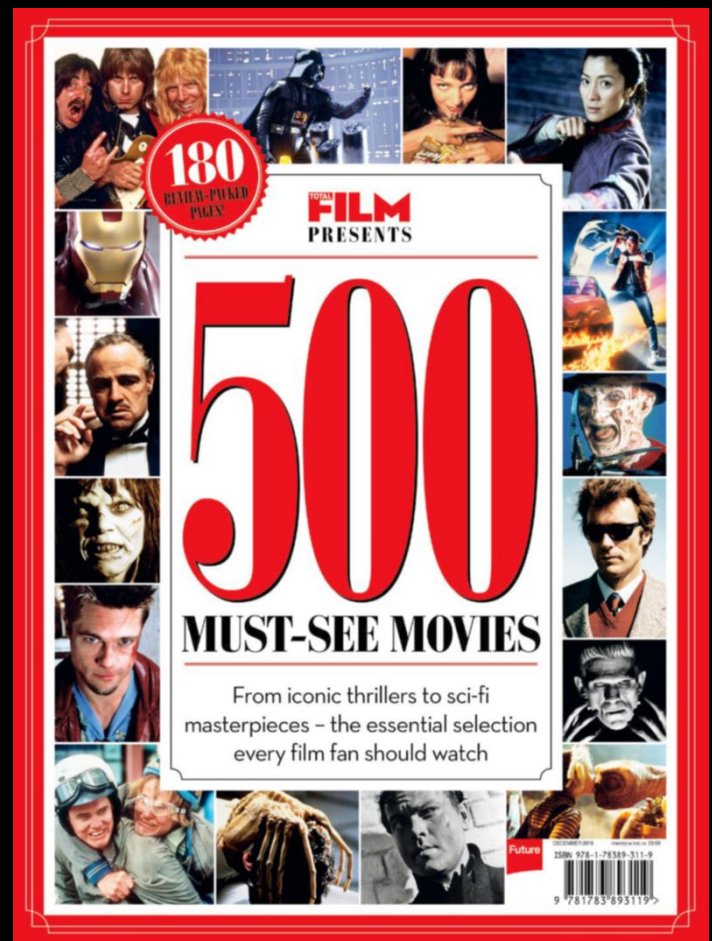
On paper, the starting point is as generic as it gets. Three high school girls are abducted by Kevin (a shaven-headed James McAvoy). They wake in a windowless room, and soon realise their captor is effectively several different people, ranging from a domineering matriarch to a nine-year-old boy. But it's not just a captivity story. A B-plot in the outside world involves the man's therapist (Betty Buckley), who knows the dark corners of her patient's multi-faceted personality. Unfortunately, even she doesn't know all of them...

Early on, it's easy to be sceptical of both the story – how on earth can it do anything new with such well-trodden turf? – and of McAvoy's much-hyped performance, which initially seems like a set of sketch show turns. And yet over the film's duration both the story and the performance gel, with enough complexity to reward repeat viewings.

Buckley plays a convincingly good professional and person, while Anya Taylor-Joy intrigues as one of McAvoy's captives who finds strange ways to connect to him. The shifts from menace to farce are jarring but justifiable, and menace prevails. There's a show-stopper goofy-scary dance scene, but also some very unHollywood harshness. The nastiness is non-exploitative but upsetting (there's child abuse). The film is indulgently long at nearly two hours, but the ending is one of the director's two or three best. For the first time in a long while, it makes us look forward to whatever Shyamalan does next. **Andrew Osmond**

During the shoot, a frustrated McAvoy punched a door, thinking it was fake. But it was metal, and he broke his hand.

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to the best films
ever made

BLAIR WITCH

Can't see The Woods for the trees

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 16 JANUARY

(download)

23 JANUARY (Blu-ray/DVD)

2016 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director Adam Wingard

▶ Cast James Allen McCune, Callie Hernandez, Corbin Reid

❖ In 1999, unknown filmmakers

Eduardo Sanchez and Daniel Myrick's *The Blair Witch Project* exploded onto screens. A massive, unexpected critical and financial success, it became a milestone in horror filmmaking, and one of the first examples of viral marketing.

In 2016, a sequel came out of nowhere after Lionsgate revealed, via a San Diego Comic-Con screening, that slated horror *The Woods* was a stealth follow-up. Then it hit cinemas, made hardly any money, and all talk of an expanded universe went quiet. So what went wrong? And can the home ent release help the movie find its way out of the woods?

Decades after the events of the original, documentarian Heather Donahue's little brother James is now fully grown and obsessed with the mystery of what happened to his sister. When a video discovered in the woods where Heather and her crew vanished shows footage of a house and a figure that could be Heather herself, James resolves to head

back to the scene with his friends.

Tooled up with kit – drones, multiple cameras and GPS – the kids meet locals Lane and Talia, Blair Witch legend nerds who insist on accompanying the group.

Structurally it's faithful to the original, with the gang getting lost, falling out and being terrorised by noises in the night with escalating intensity, leading to a finale which is breathless, shocking and intense. It's tightly paced, the addition of new tech is smart (if underused) and the characters, while generic and forgettable, at least don't make stupid decisions that leave you wishing for their demise. *Blair Witch* is modern, inventive and frequently very scary. Trouble is it's both too slavish to the original and not slavish enough, structured almost like a remake but swapping *TBWP*'s maddening ambiguity for supernatural shocks. No spoilers, but *Blair Witch* throws in some timey-wimey business, some body horror and an *actual monster*.

The film grossed just \$21 million at the US box office. For context: 2010's *A Nightmare On Elm Street* made \$63 million. Hopefully *Blair Witch* will find its true home on disc, with obsessive fans who can pick through writer Simon Barrett and director Adam Wingard's carefully constructed mythology in their own time. Because despite the lukewarm



Leaves: bastards.



"This reminds me. I forgot to set my box for Gardeners' World."

critical response, this is a good horror film. It's the only *Blair Witch* film which could realistically have been made in 2016. We're all far too cynical to believe claims that a story is real these days, and audiences are suffering from found-footage fatigue. The barrage of sequels, remakes, reboots, spin-offs and expanded franchises has left horror fans thirsty for something else, something more – scares we haven't seen before. Wingard couldn't end his movie on a beat that reveals almost nothing concrete about what we've been

“Modern, inventive and frequently very scary”

watching, any more than he could sustain tension by simply showing increasingly stressed-out people getting lost in a forest. In a world where “based on true events” means a ghostly nun-demon haunting in a north London council flat (*The Conjuring 2*) this



might not be the *Blair Witch* movie we wanted, but it's probably the one we deserve.

➦ **Extras** "We made everyone's second-least favourite *Blair Witch* movie!" Recorded two weeks after the film's disappointing open weekend, Barrett and Wingard's commentary is painfully self-deprecating; after about the fifth joke about how everyone hated it you start to feel really sorry for them. Though a little overly technical at times, it's a decent listen. The two emphatically confirm that the creature we see at the end was *not* intended to be the

Blair Witch; apparently cut material where the legends surrounding the Witch are debated might have made that clearer (though this was "not worked up enough" to be included as deleted scenes). Despite acknowledging that there'll never be a sequel, the two refuse to explain exactly what was going on, though. Over six parts, feature-length doc *Neverending Night* (107 minutes) obviously has some overlap with the commentary, but provides more detailed insights into areas like editing, sound design and the Comic-Con

screening. Highlights include behind-the-scenes footage of the head-mounted cameras, the tunnel sequence and the gore effects. Incidentally, if you did assume that That Thing was the *Blair Witch*, this doc will reassure you that you're not dumb, as both the editor and sound designer call it that too! Finally, Wingard and the production designer take us on a tour of the impressive sets for the Rustin Parr house in a 16-minute featurette. **Penny Archer/Ian Berriman**

i Unlike the original movie, the whole of *Blair Witch* was scripted. Adam Wingard used air horns to scare the cast.

THE WHICH BLAIR PROJECT*

Pit your Blair wits against our quiz!



QUESTION 1

She played potty-mouthed, pea soup-vomiting possessee Regan in *The Exorcist*. But what's her name, huh? Clue: the correct surname is Blair.

QUESTION 2

In the *Hellboy* films, who played Big Red's love interest Liz Sherman? Yes, it's another Blair.

QUESTION 3

George Orwell was a pen name. What was the *Nineteen Eighty-Four* author's real name? Are you getting the hang of this yet?

QUESTION 4

Name the controversial 2000 *AD* comic in which Tony Blair had a computer intelligence called Doctor Spin implanted in his brain. Clue: aim for something Blair-y.

QUESTION 5

What was the no-nonsense pilot played by Moon Bloodgood in *Terminator: Salvation* called? Stumped? Don't worry – absolutely no one remembers this, including Moon Bloodgood.



ANSWERS
1 Linda Blair 2 Selma Blair 3 Eric Arthur Blair 4 BLAIR 5 Blair Williams

* Yes, we just wanted to do this so we could use the headline.



DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

- 🍷 Charlie fails to get a joke, or understand something basic about human culture.
- 🍷 A character bursts into tears – or looks like they're on the brink of doing so.
- 🍷 April's eyes glow red as she makes a connection with the Shadow Kin leader.
- 🍷 Someone mentions UNIT, or Zygons, or the Doctor.
- 🍷 Charlie and Miss Quill argue again about whether his control over her makes her a prisoner or a slave.
- 🍷 Someone wails, "I love you!"

The blame game for the vanished board rubber continued to rage.

CLASS Series One

School of hard knocks

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 16 JANUARY

2016 | 15 | DVD

▶ Creator Patrick Ness

▶ Cast Greg Austin, Fady Elsayed, Sophie Hopkins, Vivian Oparah

❖ **Given that it centres on a school** (Coal Hill, a key location in the first *Doctor Who* story), you might have thought this teen-targeted *Who* spin-off would share DNA with BBC's *The Sarah Jane Adventures*. Instead, it out-Torchwoods *Torchwood*.

The format sees threats emerging through cracks in space/time, much as they did in Captain Jack's manor – though another trouble-magnet is alien prince/pupil Charlie and alien warrior/teacher Miss Quill, both delivered

to Earth by the Doctor to save them from genocidal Shadow-monsters. Then there's the (not explicit, but recurrent) sexual content – well, what did you expect from a show populated by horny teenagers? Oh, and the amped-up violence: *Class* gleefully splashes bucketloads of blood about the Whoniverse, often while delivering joltingly abrupt deaths for recurring characters.

The series also shares *Torchwood*'s, ahem, unfettered approach to story concepts, with hit-and-miss results. Episode seven's use of a "metaphysical engine" which transports people to places which only exist *conceptually* is a delight. But then we also get a killer tattoo and an invasion by carnivorous flowers.

The latter is a fair stab at aping *Who*'s tactic of making the everyday extraordinary, but there's something inescapably bathetic about bloodied extras stumbling about in piles of pink petals.

The final similarity: the emotional tone. Remember Ianto blubbing over his dead Cyber-converted girlfriend? Imagine a whole series pitched at that level. Though perhaps another TV series is a better comparison: *The X Factor* – specifically, the way it's de rigueur for contestants to have some tragic backstory which Made Them The Person They Are Today (and to constantly harp on about it). *Class* is awash with these, with folksy violinist April lumbered with enough trauma for two, poor love: the estranged dad who attempted

suicide and the paralysed mum. What's more, the series continues to pile on the character-building catastrophe as it proceeds.

The cast is uniformly excellent, and the series is to be commended for taking the lives of its teenage characters seriously. Still, for any viewers *not* currently surfing a hormonal maelstrom, the histrionics can get a bit wearily emo. You may find yourself fervently wishing for just one Coal Hill pupil whose biggest problem is homework. Or, at the very least, for characters who don't loudly define themselves before we've had a chance to see their *actions* do so. The fact that the most successful episode barely features the kids at all, focusing instead on Miss Quill (a bracingly astringent Katherine Kelly) speaks volumes. End of year report: maybe don't try quite so hard, actually.

➤ **Extras** A 15-minute behind-the-scenes piece. **Calvin Baxter**

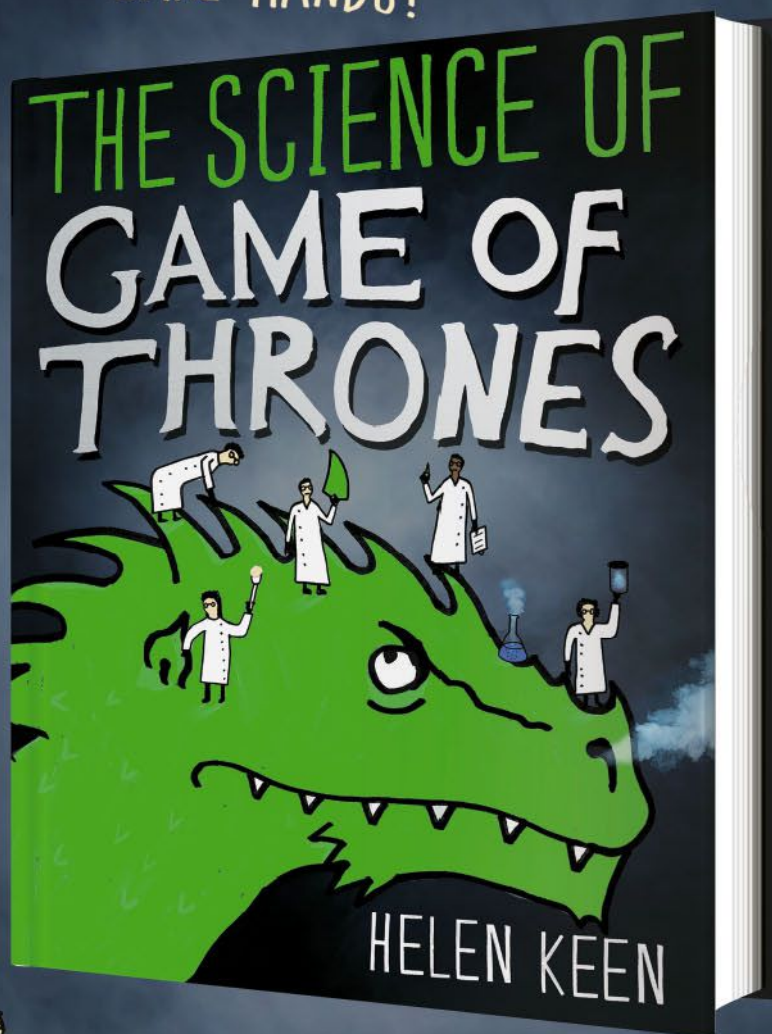
i In episode one, the old lady in the minimart is June Hudson, who redesigned Tom Baker's costume for his final year.

DO DRAGONS
ACTUALLY EXIST?

OUT
NOW

IS IT POSSIBLE TO CRUSH
A PERSON'S HEAD WITH
YOUR BARE HANDS?

CAN YOU REALLY KILL
SOMEONE WITH
MOLTEN GOLD?



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MIND-BLOWING, AND FUN-FILLED
EXPEDITION THROUGH THE WORLD OF
GAME OF THRONES



COLONY Season One

Is resistance futile?

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 16 JANUARY

2016 | 12 | DVD

▶ Creators Carlton Cuse, Ryan J Condal

▶ Cast Josh Holloway, Sarah Wayne

Callies, Peter Jacobson, Tory Kittles

❖ **Colony must be the oddest** alien invasion show ever made, for one very simple reason: there are no aliens. Well, practically...

Set a year after their arrival, it's located in a near-future Los Angeles surrounded by 30-foot-high walls, administered on their behalf by a human Transitional Authority. Caught trying to escape the Bloc to search for his missing son, former FBI agent Will Bowman (*Lost*'s Josh Holloway And His Lovely Hair) is blackmailed into using his skills to hunt down members of the resistance.

Nine of these 10 episodes pass without so much as a glimpse of the alien "Raps", or even an explanation of their nickname – the nearest we get to them are the deadly drones which buzz around the city. Initially, this seems like lunacy. Then you realise that it's actually quite a smart, original move. Sidelining the invaders leaves space to explore the ethical issues of living under occupation. Do you collaborate, like Will? Or do you resist – like (unbeknownst to him) Will's wife, Katie (*The Walking Dead*'s Sarah Wayne Callies)?

The high-concept makes for a different kind of protagonist. Bowman collaborates reluctantly, and for the best of reasons – if he doesn't, his family will suffer, while if he does, he may be

reunited with his son – but he still collaborates. Yet you can still empathise. This is a world with practically no clear-cut goodies or baddies – just people struggling to survive, and engaging in all kinds of morally grey behaviour to do so. And the arguments made against the resistance can be persuasive – are they deluded idealists, only causing more suffering?

Colony can be frustrating. Hell, we're science fiction fans – we want to see spaceships and aliens! Plus from time to time it descends into sub-24 corn: much of the plotting relies on Will blabbing to his missus about his top-secret work; sensitive conversations forever seem to be taking place surrounded by possible eawiggers; Katie seems to think you become invisible if you put a baseball cap on; and

“A slightly cheesy espionage thriller”

the ease with which she becomes a ruthless killer rather defies belief. All the same, it deserves praise for trying something a little bit different.

Like Kenneth Johnson's original *V*, *Colony* is attempting to mix a little intellectual stimulation in with its populist entertainment. It's essentially a slightly cheesy espionage thriller, with all the double-crosses, gun battles and explosions that entails, but it's one that will also make you think about how difficult it is to stand up against a totalitarian regime, and whether you would *really* have the moral purity or the courage to do so.

❖ **Extras** Seven deleted scenes (seven minutes) and a preview piece that aired before the series (22 minutes). **Ian Berriman**

i The bar Katie runs, the Yoknapatawpha, is named after the fictional county where William Faulkner set most of his novels.



Commuting on Southern Rail does this.

FRIGHT NIGHT

Roddy marvellous

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1985 | 18 | Blu-ray & DVD

(dual format)

▶ Director Tom Holland

▶ Cast William Ragsdale, Chris

Sarandon, Roddy McDowall

BLU-RAY DEBUT **The most** compelling character in this classic '80s vampire romp is Peter Vincent (Roddy McDowall). As a late-night TV horror host, he's aged out of relevance, so when awkward teen Charley (William Ragsdale) begs him to confront his bloodsucking neighbour, he's so flattered he almost agrees. Then Charley's friends offer to pay him, and he's so hard-up he doesn't have any choice but to agree.

He seems particularly poignant now, in this new 4k restoration, because we're now further away from *Fright Night*'s original release than it was from Hammer Horror's heyday. Both Vincent and the film are throwbacks twice over. But teenagers will always be awkward, vampires will always be cool, and the gooey special effects hold up surprisingly well in unforgiving high-def.

❖ **Extras** Bucketloads, including a new 147-minute documentary, a 28-minute interview with writer/director Tom Holland about his career, 54 minutes of shaky footage of the cast on a panel at Fear Fest 2008, trailers, galleries and lots more. The steelbook edition on sale now comes with a booklet; the regular edition due in April won't. **Sarah Dobbs**

i Star William Ragsdale broke his foot after tripping down a staircase, and shot many scenes wearing a cast.



Flying: better with the whole family.



Blackpool Pleasure Beach has really gone downhill.

THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR

The ballot and the bullets

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2016 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director James DeMonaco

▶ Cast Frank Grillo, Elizabeth Mitchell, Mykelti Williamson

❖ **If you're even vaguely left of centre**, watching a dystopian film centred on a US election probably doesn't hold much appeal right now. And when discussing its female candidate and how "all she needs is Florida", this third entry in the *Purge* saga really twists the knife... But try not to let that put you off.

Anti-Purge candidate Charlie Roan (Elizabeth Mitchell) is stranded on the streets after those behind the annual slaughter-fest try to take her out. *The Purge*:

Anarchy's Frank Grillo is the security guy trying to keep her alive.

Election Year is more expansive and action-packed than previous instalments, but it continues the trend of increasing politicisation – and the largely African-American cast can't help but feel like a nod to Black Lives Matter. Its messaging isn't subtle, and by treating psychopathy like cosplay it often resembles a Marilyn Manson video. But it's rare that part three of a franchise is as strong as the first – and wraps things up in satisfying fashion.

❖ **Extras** Seven deleted/extended scenes; two featurettes. **Ian Berriman**

i Ted Cruz's Presidential candidacy informed James DeMonaco's rewrites: "The Minister has a definite Ted-like quality".



The sun was really getting in his eyes.

THE WHITE KING

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 30 JANUARY**

2016 | 12 | DVD

❖ **Shot in Hungary**, this dystopian drama imagines a run-down totalitarian state whose citizens live in rural austerity (it feels like a very small world, despite the giant statues dotted around). A young boy and his mother (Agyness Deyn) try to cope after the boy's father is arrested for treason.

Despite the intended pathos, the feeling is more of tedium; the vague story just doesn't go anywhere, despite good turns from Jonathan Pryce and Fiona Shaw as the boy's grandparents.

❖ **Extras** Two featurettes.

Andrew Osmond



His *TMNT* costume creeped out the kids.

WORM

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 16 JANUARY**

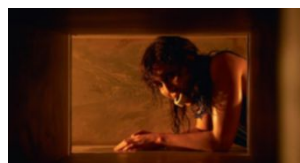
2014 | 15 | DVD

❖ **There's a decent SF idea** at the heart of *Worm*: in a future where mankind has lost the ability to dream, people turn to genetically-engineered parasites with the power to generate vivid fantasies.

But despite its stabs at verisimilitude – mock commercials, news reports – the film never sells its world, crippled by a meandering, improvised script and a giddy tonal lurch from whimsy to something nastier in the final act.

❖ **Extras** Commentary; deleted scenes; short film;

trailers. **Nick Setchfield**



Hide and seek could go on for hours...

RUPTURE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 9 JANUARY**

2016 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

❖ **This low-budget sci-fi horror** starts well enough. Noomi Rapace plays a single mother to an unhappy boy who, after being spied on, is abducted by a mysterious organisation and taken to a subterranean facility to be interrogated. Why? Who by? And in the end, who cares?

Rapace's plunge into a dimly-lit netherworld soon feels dismal and tiresome; it then goes a bit *Saw*, followed by doses of obvious CGI. The odd idea intrigues but overall this is no fun for anyone.

❖ **Extras** None. **Russell Lewin**



It's Morphin' Time!

THE GUYVER

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1991 | 12 | Blu-ray & DVD (dual format)

❖ **An American remake of an anime/manga**, this Z-grade '90s dreck sees a youth finding alien armour and fighting mutants.

The alien suits are good, and there are a few decent effects towards the end, but the script and characters are Troma-level braindead. Still, if you can endure the protracted *Power Rangers*-style brawls, then you might enjoy the awfulness – especially with a moustached Mark Hamill in a prominent "goodie" support role.

❖ **Extras** A short interview with producer Brian Yuzna; gallery; trailer. **Andrew Osmond**

HOME ENTERTAINMENT



Inside the hairdresser's waiting room.

SADAKO VS KAYAKO

Cursed film

★★★★★

► RELEASED JANUARY

2016 | SVOD

► Director Kôji Shiraishi

► Cast Rina Endo, Elly Nanami,

Mizuki Yamamoto, Tina Tamashiro

SHUDDER *Ring Vs Grudge* started life as a joke, an April Fool's Day trailer designed to give fans a chuckle. Evil knows they needed a laugh, with the most recent *Ringu/Ju-On* instalments (*Sadako 3D 2*, and *Ju-On: The Final Curse*) both being franchise nadirs. The reaction was so positive a real version was rushed into production, in an apparent attempt to prove the saying "things can always get worse".

Sadako Vs Kayako ostensibly takes the framework of a *Ring* movie (a cursed videotape causes a long-haired ghost-face killer to crawl out of your telly) and adds *Grudge* characters (frog-throated spooks really hate house-guests) to the story. Our idiotic heroes are studying the *Ring* curse and decide to watch the tape anyway, then hang out in the *Grudge* house in the hope that the ghosts will fight over the right to kill them.

If this sounds like a simpler version of *Freddy Vs Jason*, well, that's because it is. As in that film, *Sadako Vs Kayako*'s constant humour drains any tension from the narrative. *SvK*'s been picked up by "Netflix for horror fans" Shudder, but we'd rather stream *Sadako*'s VHS than suffer it again. **Sam Ashurst**

i This is the twelfth entry for both franchises, despite the fact that they were previously unconnected.



But do they serve Chips? Arf.

HUMANS Series Two Rise Of The Machines

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► RELEASED 16 JANUARY

2016 | 15 | DVD

► Creators Sam Vincent,

Jonathan Brackley

► Cast Emily Berrington, Gemma Chan, Colin Morgan, Katherine Parkinson

► **Aside from bringing in *The Matrix*'s Carrie-Anne Moss** to fill the "Hollywood name" hole vacated by William Hurt, the second series of Channel 4's hit AI drama couldn't be more British if it tried. Covering similar territory to the mega-budget *Westworld*, *Humans*' low-key, suburban approach to androids dealing with their new-found consciousness makes for an intriguing counterpoint. The show's most obvious special effect may be giving its "synth" stars green contact lenses, but that doesn't mean it's any less compelling than its grander American cousin.

While series one was neatly self-contained, this second outing massively expands the show's focus as it explores the consequences of a world filled with human-like robots: more synths gain consciousness, tech firms strive to create their own

self-aware machines, and we meet humans who live pretending to be synthetic. It's loaded with ideas, yet the show never loses sight of the fact that the tech itself is not as important as the way it impacts upon its characters, whether they're organic or synthetic – few shows service a large cast so even-handedly, though it's arguably the synths (particularly Emily Berrington's rebellious Niska) who really stand out.

Admittedly there's little original about the story arc, with plot elements lifted from the usual suspects like *Ex Machina*, *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, and even *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "The Measure Of A Man". But despite the familiarity, it's packaged in such a plausible way that that you totally buy into a world where synths are as ubiquitous as smartphones. A worthy continuation of the UK's sci-fi tradition.

► **Extras** Just two short featurettes: a Making Of and a closer look at Niska's escape.

Richard Edwards

i Emily Berrington (Niska) once worked as a case-worker for a Labour MP, and spoke at the 2015 Labour Party conference.



UKIP's Christmas party was going well.

WITCHING & BITCHING

Evil España

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2013 | SVOD

► Director Álex de la Iglesia

► Cast Hugo Silva, Carolina Bang,

Carmen Maura, Jaime Ordóñez

SHUDDER If *The Witch's Black Phillip* had tried to lure *Witching & Bitching*'s spellcasters out into the woods, they'd've lopped off his horns and eaten him for dinner. Álex de la Iglesia's latest Spanish-language horror-comedy sees a gang of pawn shop robbers run into a demented coven on the eve of a sacred ritual, and all kinds of witchy mayhem ensues.

De la Iglesia isn't a director known for his restraint, and he definitely doesn't hold back here. From the opening robbery (in which a man dressed as an off-brand Spongebob is graphically gunned down) to the eye-popping finale (where a giant deity fights flying witches), there's barely a frame of this movie that doesn't have something incredible in it.

It does get a little exhausting towards the end, especially because there's not quite enough story to support the film's 112-minute runtime. And its gender politics occasionally seem a bit suspect – especially because it's impossible to know who, if anyone, you're meant to be rooting for. But it's hard to think of another film with quite as much riotous energy. You'll certainly never look at a broomstick the same way again. **Sarah Dobbs**

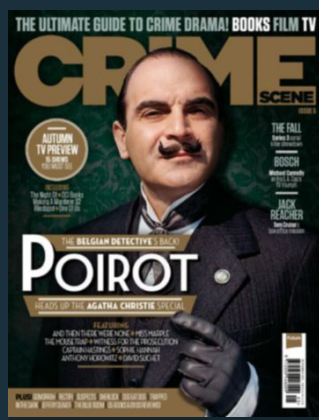
i Two more Spanish horrors are now streaming via Shudder: *Shrew's Nest* and *The Corpse Of Anna Fritz*.

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Green Day's new look intrigued all.

KUBO AND THE TWO STRINGS



Poetry in stopmotion

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** 16 JANUARY

2016 | PG | 3D Blu-ray/Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director Travis Knight

▶ Cast Art Parkinson, Charlize Theron, Matthew McConaughey, Rooney Mara

➤ **Coraline and Paranorman** studio Laika takes its state-of-the-art version of stopmotion to ancient Japan in one of the best genre movies of 2016. The visuals are as slick as anything Pixar can do, but the tactile quality of the puppets gives the film an extra element of magic. In fact, the animation is so impressive that you spend half the film trying to work out how they did it – it would be distracting if the story wasn't so captivating in its own right.

As young Kubo embarks on a quest to recover a sacred suit of armour, his adventure is brimming with heart, taps into some sophisticated themes and mythology, and boasts wonderful supporting players. *Kubo* flopped at the cinema, but hopefully word of mouth can now turn it into a hit. ➤ **Extras** The DVD gets about half an hour of making-of featurettes. They're brief, but it's a real eye-opener looking behind-the-scenes at innovations like an 18-foot stopmotion skeleton puppet. The Blu-ray adds director's commentary and a brief promo featurette. **Richard Edwards**

i *Kubo* director and Laika CEO Travis Knight is the son of Phil Knight, founder and chairman of Nike.

DONNIE DARKO



Bunny peculiar

★★★★★

EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED** OUT NOW! (limited edition)/9 JANUARY

2001 | 15 | Blu-ray & DVD (dual format)/Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director Richard Kelly

▶ Cast Jake Gyllenhaal, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Drew Barrymore

➤ **Fifteen years on, Richard Kelly's** coming of age/time travel head-fuck-athon feels as relevant as when it first befuddled audiences. Its on-trend '80s nostalgia, implied superheroics and pop-heavy soundtrack are all right at home in 2017.

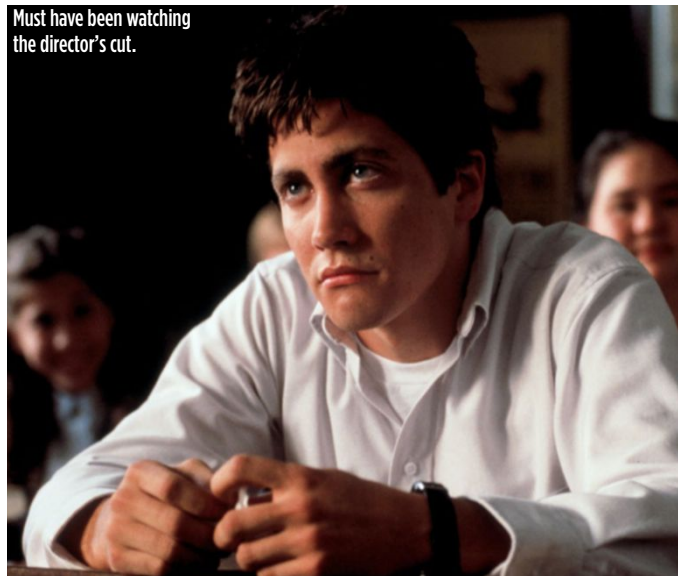
Donnie (Jake Gyllenhaal) is a troubled teen who, after dodging a falling jet engine, finds himself haunted by an ominous figure in a bunny suit who promises that the world will end in 28 days if he doesn't do... *something*. But while the film's plot is cloaked in

mystery, it's far more concerned with the lives of its characters. It's also a masterpiece – a modern indie classic that's finally getting the home release it deserves, with a scrubbed up 4K restoration on both versions of the film.

Both versions? Yes, there's a director's cut too (well, unless you buy the DVD...). It's 20 minutes longer, but the changes to the sound and visual effects come at the cost of atmosphere and ambiguity. You get a better sense of what Kelly thinks it's about... but where's the fun in that? Worst of all, several of the songs have been changed. Frankly, a *Donnie Darko* that starts with INXS rather than Echo And The Bunnymen is not a *Donnie Darko* worth watching. Stick to the original.

➤ **Extras** The highlight is a new feature-length documentary which details the film's rocky road

Must have been watching the director's cut.



to production. Kelly's short "The Goodbye Place" is an intriguing forerunner to *Darko*. There's also a "production diary" – basically an hour of behind-the-scenes footage – and a slew of new interviews. Pretty much everything from the previous releases is included too

(three commentaries, features on fandom, trailers, infomercials and more). The limited edition version comes with a collector's book, poster and postcards. **Will Salmon**

i The role of paedophile life coach Jim Cunningham (played by Patrick Swayze) was initially offered to David Hasselhoff.



Cute, but the mess afterwards...

THREE WISHES FOR CINDERELLA

A whole different ball game

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1973 | PG | DVD

▶ Director Václav Vorlíček

▶ Cast Libuše Šafránková, Pavel

Trávníček, Carola Braunbock

❖ A perennial fixture of festive TV schedules not only in its homeland but also Germany, Switzerland and Norway, this fairytale adventure may demolish any preconceptions you had about Czech cinema.

Filmed partly in East Germany, its story unfolds in stunning snowy vistas, to a swoonsome harpsichord and woodwind score. Based on a different version of the classic tale to that which inspired most adaptations, it has no fairy godmother or pumpkin transformed into a coach. Instead, Cinders cracks open three magical hazelnuts to provide her costume changes – and even this fantastical element is downplayed.

This Cinders is far less passive than usual – a spirited girl, in tune with nature. Yes, she ends up hitched to the Prince, but initially she's more interested in riding her horse – and both her horsemanship and prowess with a bow are the match of any man. It's an utterly charming production – and a rare old-fashioned fairytale unlikely to grate with feminist viewers.

❖ **Extras** Trailers, a booklet, and a comprehensive 32-minute appreciation by journo Michael Brooke. **Ian Berriman**

▶ Pavel Trávníček (the Prince) dubbed Jeff Goldblum's role for the Czech release of *Independence Day*.



Hoodies and chess: rarely seen together.

MORGAN

Gene genie

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 9 JANUARY**

2016 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director Luke Scott

▶ Cast Kate Mara, Anya Taylor-Joy, Paul Giamatti, Toby Jones

❖ **It's all in the genes.** Just as *Blade Runner* found Ridley Scott exploring the notion of artificial lifeforms, *Morgan* sees son – and creative heir – Luke Scott take on genetic engineering, a topic that's moved closer to the edge of possibility since Harrison Ford chased down replicants back in '82.

A prim, chilly Kate Mara is a risk management consultant, assigned to report on a troubled project to create a synthetic being known as Morgan. She's played with a fierce otherworldliness by *The Witch*'s Anya Taylor-Joy, a shadowed, hooded presence with the body language of a wary animal and the internalised intensity of a damaged child. She's great in this: empathic, unknowable, polite, lethal.

Echoing *Ex Machina*, Scott fashions a compact, provocative parable out of a science-baiting premise, though it's a movie that feels deadened by its own

earnestness (Paul Giamatti's turn as an arrogant psych evaluator brings much-needed humour around the halfway point). A final reel swerve into Bourne-style action thriller reframes the whole thing as a superpowered espionage tale – a well-executed burst of adrenaline, but one that leaves this 21st century *Frankenstein* just a little less out of the ordinary.

❖ **Extras** Documentary "Modified Organism: The Science Behind Morgan" (20 minutes) explores the technology – and ethical implications – of genetic engineering. Packed with expert opinions, it's heartening and chilling in equal measure. *Loom* is a short film written and directed by Luke Scott (20 minutes), a moody, Ridley-indebted dystopian tale that shares a thematic connection with *Morgan*. Six minutes of deleted scenes include one that reveals Morgan's androgynous nature. The movie itself, the short and the deleted scenes all come with optional commentary by Scott; you also get a gallery and trailers. **Nick Setchfield**

▶ Luke Scott's in *Alien*, when the Nostromo crew approach the derelict ship – his dad used kids to make the sets look bigger.

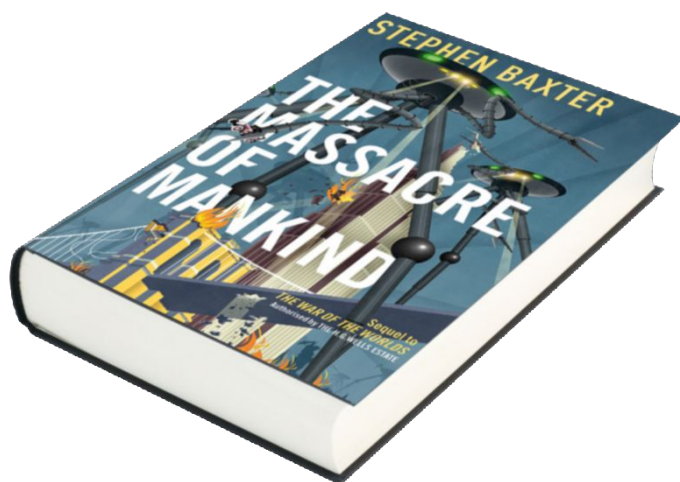
(ROUND UP)



The joy that is **YONDERLAND SERIES THREE** (out now, DVD) sees Debbie facing a house move that will sever her ties to the fantastical realm – just as it's taken over by Stephen Fry's Cuddly Dick (despite the name, he's a right bastard). You'd think all this puppet-filled silliness would get old after three years, but nope, this fantasy comedy show is as witty, inventive and downright delightful as ever. Baffling decision of the month: Network's one to give a '70s telefantasy favourite its HD debut in single volumes. **RANDALL**

AND HOPKIRK (DECEASED) VOLUME ONE (9 January, Blu-ray) features the first four episodes, leaving 22 to go. Guys! We're short on shelf space! Sadly this ITC series' great premise – a PI investigates with the help of his ghostly partner – feels rather wasted on down-to-earth cases concerning stolen diamonds or old bank notes. The *Village Of The Damned*-ish **LET'S BE**

EVIL (30 January, DVD) sees gifted kids being groomed for greatness in a subterranean bunker... cue rebellion. We said: "Its drive is a single, flat note. No mystery to unravel, no plot developments, just people looking scared until the twist – which isn't worth waiting for." Finally, Netflix subscribers should keep 'em peeled for sci-fi actioneer **SPECTRAL** (out now, SVOD), in which a special-ops team including Emily Mortimer takes on ghost-like entities in a European city of the future. This was originally going to be a theatrical release, then a DVD, and was unavailable for review. All this surely signals one thing: it'll be, er, amazing?



THE MASSACRE OF MANKIND

Sometimes they come back...



► **RELEASED 19 JANUARY**

464 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author **Stephen Baxter**

► Publisher **Gollancz**

❖ **The world doesn't lack for** reinterpretations of and sequels to HG Wells's *The War Of The Worlds*. Whether we're talking books heavily influenced by Wells, Orson Welles's 1938 radio broadcast, sundry movies, Jeff Wayne's overblown musical or the underrated 1988 TV series, it's a text that constantly finds its way back to the centre of our culture.

It's easy to understand why. It's a scientific romance that serves as a template for every aliens-invade-Earth narrative that's followed. For storytellers across all kinds of genres, the temptation to go back to the source is overwhelming.

Which is also why it's not unreasonable to treat new adaptations and interpretations with some cynicism. What is there to add? Who cares about tripod fighting machines and aliens so

rubbish (spoiler alert!) that they don't have flu jabs before invading a foreign world?

Stephen Baxter's sequel to Wells's SF foundation stone provides the answer to these questions. Authorised by the HG Wells Estate, it's a book that clears away the cultural clutter that surrounds the story, and instead engages anew with the book itself and with its author.

His starting point is the neat idea that the first Martian invasion wasn't a full-blown invasion. Rather, it was an exploratory, fact-finding expedition, akin to Christopher Columbus crossing the Atlantic. As for that lack of flu

“This is not a flashy book, but it's exciting and tense”

jabs, Baxter follows the cosmology of Wells's original story: the Sun is gradually cooling and the Martians have had to survive on an arid planet where the ecosystem long ago broke down. They'd forgotten about bugs.

But the Martians are patient and, rather than giving up, have merely been biding their time. At the dawn of the Jazz Age – Baxter assumes the original invasion took place in 1907 and creates an alternate history where Britain doesn't side with France in 1914 – they return to southern England, a prelude to further landings.

This time around, it's an invasion we see through the eyes of a journalist and suffragette, Julie Elphinstone. The shift in perspective is important. If Wells's unnamed narrator, here dubbed Walter Jenkins as we meet him again, is traumatised by the landings, Elphinstone brings a reporter's eye to analysing what happens and atmospherically describing what she personally sees – and Elphinstone witnesses horrors as aliens once again take control of south-east England, occasionally harvesting the human population for food, which gives her testimony more than a hint of the zombie apocalypse.

If that suggests Baxter is having some gentle fun at the expense of genre clichés, that's probably intended, because it comes in the context of a novel that's full of sly references. Even Elphinstone's somewhat dry tone, you suspect, exists because she in some sense represents Wells in her rationalism, her ability to think past obvious solutions and her streak of utopianism. Let's not forget that Wells was an advocate for women's rights.

All of this doesn't make for a novel with a modern feel, and you might argue that at moments it's too much of a pastiche. But Baxter conjures up the idealistic spirit of Herbert George as he updates his storytelling for the 21st century. This is not a flashy book, but it's exciting, tense, and more than big and clever enough to be something of a triumph. **Jonathan Wright**

i This isn't Baxter's first follow-up to Wells. His 1995 novel *The Time Ships* was an authorised sequel to *The Time Machine*.



THE BEAR AND THE NIGHTINGALE

Cold hands, warm heart



► **RELEASED 26 JANUARY**

336 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **Katherine Arden**

► Publisher **Del Rey**

❖ **We would advise reading** this book wrapped in blankets, preferably while sitting in front of a roaring fire. Katherine Arden's debut is a fairytale set in medieval Russia (aka Rus'), and its depiction of life in a land where it's basically winter for eight months of the year is so detailed and vivid you can practically feel the chill numbing your fingers.

Growing up on her widowed father's rural estate, far to the north of Moscow, Vasya drives everyone around her to distraction with her spirited refusal to do the sorts of things proper young ladies are supposed to do, like mend clothes and be obedient and generally not go haring off into the nearby haunted forest...

This being a fairytale, she gets along badly with her stepmother (whose Christian piety clashes with Vasya's cheerful friendships with a host of supernatural creatures) and is being stalked by the personification of winter (Morozko, a sort of homicidal Russian Jack Frost). But this isn't just Generic Russian Fantasyland™; Arden grounds her story in a fascinating (and turbulent) period of history. Beautifully written and richly textured, it's a beguiling read.

Nic Clarke

i The Golden Horde (the Mongols who ruled Rus') were possibly named after the colour of their Khan's tent.



UNDER A WATCHFUL EYE

Out of body, out of mind



► **RELEASED 12 JANUARY**

396 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Adam Nevill

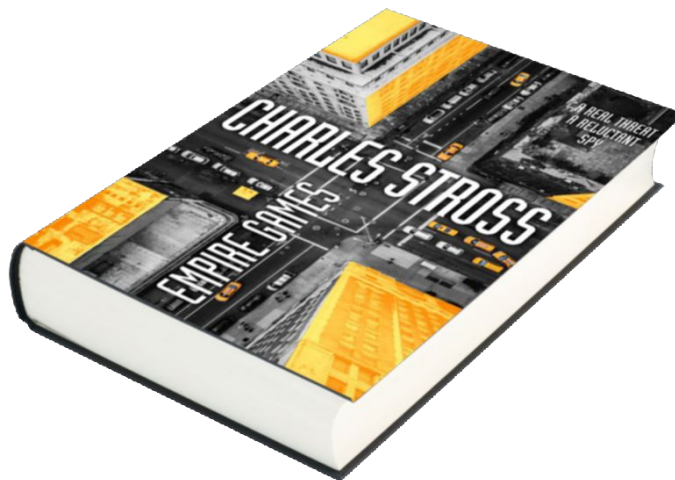
► Publisher Macmillan

☛ **Horror writer Adam Nevill** has been referred to as “Britain’s answer to Stephen King” and his latest chiller does nothing to belie that. Though this isn’t entirely a positive.

Reclusive novelist Seb is happy in his isolated property in Devon – fastidious, a neat freak, he’s contented in his middle class idyll. But a ghost from Seb’s past is about to insinuate himself in his life – a former housemate and radical thinker, now destructive alcoholic, who’s allied himself with a dark society who claim to be mastering the art of astral projection.

It’s a novel of two halves, the first focused on the grumpy author’s disgust with his uninvited house guest (the descriptions of old friend Ewan are alive with stink and rot and judgement) and the second an existential meta-narrative. This isn’t Nevill at his best – it’s more like some of King’s weaker books, but it is at least brave and experimental, and unlike *some King*, Nevill doesn’t have a problem with endings. Compelling but meandering, full of big ideas and difficult characters, *Under A Watchful Eye* is a smart, mildly depressing B-novel from a writer who is still a master of his craft. **Penny Archer**

i Nevill first thought of much of the story back in 2003, and partially developed it in 2009 short story “Yellow Teeth”.



EMPIRE GAMES

Spies in the multiverse



► **RELEASED 26 JANUARY**

326 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Charles Stross

► Publisher Tor

☛ **Multi-volume series often** make it hard for new readers to leap on-board – and when a series dramatically evolves, like Charles Stross’s *Merchant Princes* saga, the problem just gets bigger. What began in 2004 as a satirical SF-based take on portal fantasy has shifted over the years into an apocalyptic techno-thriller, and new volume *Empire Games* changes things even more drastically.

Picking up the action 17 years after a conflict between alternate versions of Earth resulted in a terrorist attack on the White House, America is now a paranoid security state in constant fear of “world-walkers” – people who can travel between alternate timelines.

The plot follows Rita Douglas, a woman recruited by the US

government as a potential world-walking spy. Rita’s story also intersects with that of Miriam Beckstein (of *Merchant Princes*) and the novel weaves a convoluted web of conspiracies, economics, intrigue and science.

Stross’s ferociously imaginative world-building is on full display here, with the novel often playing like a straighter approach to the kind of satirical espionage action he’s explored in his *Laundry* series. While the results are frequently entertaining, there’s an awful lot of catching up to do for any new readers, and it does sometimes feel like the saga’s overall story is getting so complex that it’s running out of control. The sprawling, disparate plot isn’t helped by *Empire Games* being the first volume in a new trilogy, meaning it’s almost all scene-setting and very little resolution.

However, there’s also enough promise here to suggest that things should be on a firmer course in future volumes. And even with its flaws, Stross’s latest is still proof that few other writers in SF can match him for humour, creativity and sheer density of ideas. **Saxon Bullock**

i Stross also has two *Laundry* novels in the pipeline – *The Delirium Brief*, due in June, followed by *The Labyrinth Index* in 2019.

“A lot of catching up to do for new readers”



THE LAST SACRIFICE

Riders On The Storm



► **RELEASED 5 JANUARY**

400 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author James A. Moore

► Publisher Angry Robot

☛ **Get a few pages into this** first book in the new *Tides Of War* series, and you might dismiss it as a derivative concoction. A clichéd mash-up of David Gemmell and *Game Of Thrones*? You soon realise how unfair that is.

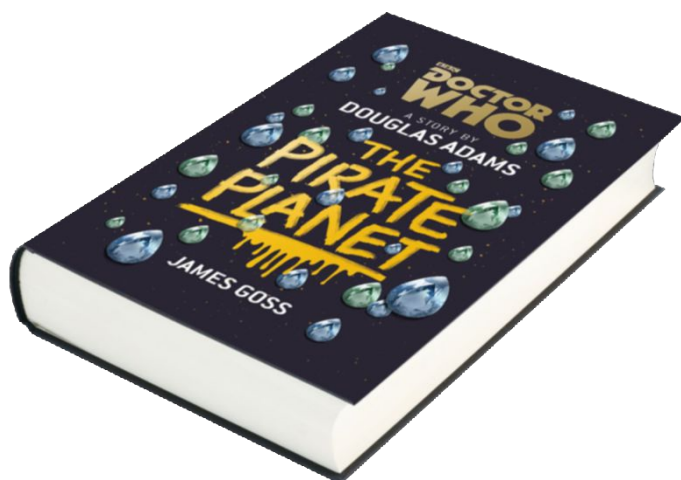
Sure, it revels in genre staples. Spineless kings, ruthless slavers, axe-throwing clansmen and icy northern wastes are all present. And the prose tends towards the predictable: darkness swallows people whole as warriors’ hearts hammer in their chests. Blah.

But the setting is creepier and the story cleverer than that first impression. James A. Moore lends a delicious moral ambiguity to the characters. In his universe, regular human sacrifices keep the apocalypse at bay. When the grotesque He-Kisshi snatch Brogan McTyre’s entire family at once, he rebels. At once, storms batter the world and McTyre finds himself on the hoof from the gods themselves...

A breakneck pace and a host of viewpoints mean paying attention is essential. The book lacks the wry self-awareness of Joe Abercrombie or the sophisticated political intrigue of George RR Martin. Yet it’s a lively addition to that canon of grim modern fantasy. **Dave Bradley**

i A prolific author, Moore still works at Starbucks, explaining “it stops me from becoming a complete hermit”.

BOOKS



DOCTOR WHO: THE PIRATE PLANET

Pieces of great



► **RELEASED 5 JANUARY**

406 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

► Author James Goss

► Publisher BBC Books

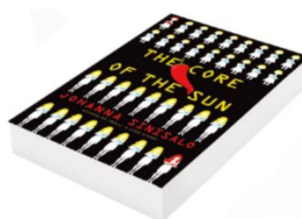
✚ **The first of three *Doctor Who* stories that Douglas Adams wrote in the late-'70s, "The Pirate Planet" is the last to finally receive the posthumous novelisation treatment – and with good reason. Unlike the strike-scuppered "Shada", it actually aired. It was also part of a wider arc, with the Doctor searching the universe for disguised fragments of the universe-balancing Key to Time.**

Set on a hollowed-out world which materialises around other planets then mines their mineral wealth, it's characteristically witty, featuring delightfully Adamsian concepts like an inertia-neutralising corridor, and a shamelessly OTT villain – the perma-raging cyborg Pirate Captain. The TARDIS team of the Fourth Doctor and Time Lady Romana is wonderfully insouciant, and author James Goss has a good handle on both – particularly the latter's unshakeable sangfroid.

If there's a minor problem, it's an old one: filling out a TV script to the length of a chunky hardback necessitates a good deal of padding via interior monologue. However, the fact that the book is based on Adams's no doubt unfilmable first draft more than compensates, resulting in a treasure trove of fascinating new material. There are minor differences – the telekinetic Mentiads are now called Mourners, for example. There's an extra K-9 subplot. There are new scenes featuring an interrogation device called the Knowhere – this entails a Dalek cameo! And a postscript gives the TARDIS console room a radical makeover.

That's not all though, with appendices sharing an Adams treatment which – though sharing basic plot elements – is 80% different, and notes in which he muses on a female Master! So in terms of giving you extra Douglas for your dollar, this is the best novelisation yet. Essential reading for fans of both Adams and classic *Who*. **Ian Berriman**

i In notes on the Key to Time, Adams suggests one piece could be Buckingham Palace, or Stonehenge!



THE CORE OF THE SUN

The Hotmouth's Tale



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

303 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Johanna Sinisalo

► Publisher Grove Press

✚ **Imagine a country where the "Ministry Of Health" had pursued eugenics to such a degree that nearly all women were born docile and submissive to men. Now also imagine that in that world alcohol and other drugs had been completely – and effectively – banned. And, in a bid for a high unobtainable elsewhere, people had turned to chili peppers; burning their mouths, stimulating their senses and leaving them in eternal pursuit of an ever hotter variety.**

Yes, this all just got a bit absurd, but not in a bad way – the parallels between the breeding of both humans and plants in pursuit of perfection are plain but not over-laboured. Protagonist Vanna appears to be a meek, dutiful "femiwoman", but in a quirk of genetics she actually possesses the intelligence and independence of the shunned neuterwomen. Addicted to chilis and searching for her missing sister, Vanna befriends a religious cult who are trying to breed a chili so hot it will take users to a higher plane of existence...

This is more "entertaining thriller" than "feminist classic", painting gender politics with broad brush strokes, but it's also an absorbing read with some impressive world-building. **Rhian Drinkwater**

i The active ingredient in chilis is capsaicin, which causes a burning sensation when it comes into contact with human tissue.

BULLET TIME A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



ARE YOU IN THE HOUSE ALONE?

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

342 pages | Hardback

► Editor Amanda Reyes

► Publisher Headpress

● This "TV movie compendium 1964-1999" is subtitled *Growing Up With Gargoyles, Giant Turtles, Valerie Harper, The Cold War, Stephen King & Co-ed Call Girls*. Phew!

● The first 77 pages feature erudite essays on subjects like Wes Craven's small-screen horror films and World War III as portrayed in TV movies.

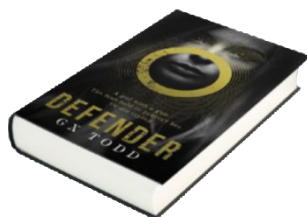
● Then there's a huge section of reviews featuring the likes of *The Night Stalker*, *Killdozer* and *Trilogy Of Terror* (along with non-fantastical material).

● Well written, weighty and full of enthusiasm for its subject matter, this is a brilliant and valuable book for those interested in a much-too-neglected genre.

● A limited edition hardback is available now from www.headpress.com, with a paperback edition due in May.



Reviews



DEFENDER

The voices made them do it



► **RELEASED 12 JANUARY**

451 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author GX Todd

► Publisher Headline

❖ **If *Defender* did have** anything new to bring to the post-apocalyptic table, it ate most of it before it rang the doorbell, leaving a few crumbs and the screwed-up packaging. Oh, and some ridiculously long extended metaphors.

Set in a world left ravaged after voices told people to kill themselves, there are trace elements of a good idea here, but they're never developed. Instead we get a massively padded, glacially slow road movie of post apocalyptic clichés, with the voices remaining an irritatingly vague, largely unexplored concept.

A Mad Max analogue called Pilgrim (who has a Voice, but is so taciturn he may as well not have) hooks up with a plucky teenager, Lacey, and another woman called Alex, who has no discernible character at all. Together they try (and fail) to avoid becoming torture porn for some bad guys who didn't quite make the cut for *The Walking Dead*. There's a potentially gamechanging twist halfway through that threatens to make things interesting... but then, disappointingly, the book hits a reset button.

There's a hint of an arc plot about the voices to be explored in – Lord help us – three more books, but this opening volume doesn't give you much reason to return to this world. **Dave Golder**

❖ Author GX Todd holds an HGV licence, because she drives a 35-foot-long mobile library around the Midlands.



ROSEBLOOD

Love never dies – sadly



► **RELEASED 10 JANUARY**

432 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author AG Howard

► Publisher Amulet Books

❖ **Teen supernatural** romances rarely set the quality bar very high, but this one's so low it's limboing under it. Set in an American music school, *RoseBlood*, in an opera house in France, it's the classic tale of weird girl meets equally odd, but handsome boy and together they overcome the usual mean girls and snotty teachers to find Twoo Wuv. In this case the boy in question is the adopted son of the Phantom of the Opera, and the girl has inherited the voice of the Phantom's lost love.

It's hard to know what to criticise first. The basic idea isn't revolutionary, but it could have been turned into something interesting. However, the France in the novel bears little resemblance to the actual country (there's more than one reference to a past "Emperor of Paris", for goodness' sake), the opera house appears to have been dreamt up by someone with no knowledge of architecture (though the bordello-chic decor gets described in some detail), and somehow a school of 50 pupils and six teachers *who also do the cleaning* is massively prestigious. Clichéd characters are the least of its problems. This book deserves to be buried under every chandelier on the planet.

Miriam McDonald

❖ Phantom creator Gaston Leroux made film versions of many of his novels – but not his most famous one.

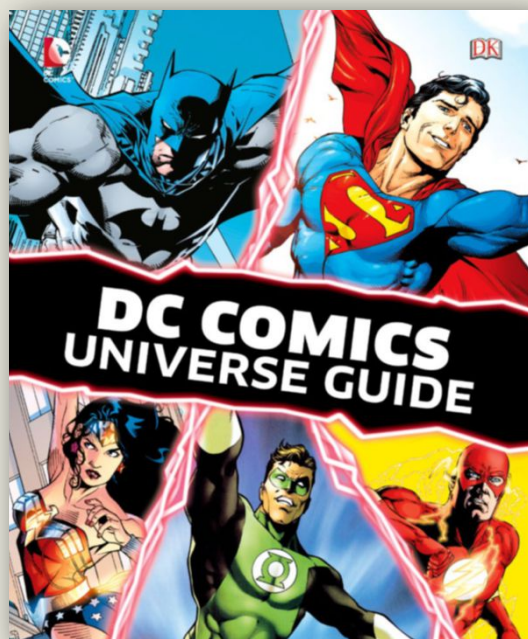
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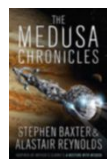
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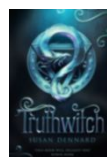
REISSUES

This month's pick of the paperbacks is Alastair Reynolds/Stephen Baxter team-up **THE MEDUSA CHRONICLES** (★★★★★, 12 January, Gollancz), which continues the story of Howard Falcon, a cyborg explorer from Arthur C Clarke's 1971 novella *A Meeting With Medusa*. When a machine achieves



consciousness, it sets the scene for a conflict between humankind and an emergent machine civilisation. We said: "There's sometimes a Clarke-ish dryness. Some of the characters seem underdeveloped too... Happily, such faults fall away when the duo's own storytelling takes flight."

No-nonsense women are to the fore in Susan Dennard's YA fantasy **TRUTHWITCH** (★★★★★, 12 January, Tor), which follows two young witches forced to flee their



home after clashing with a powerful Guildmaster. One has the ability to discern truth from lies, a valuable skill which soon makes her a target... We said: "Truthwitch casts off the current trend for gritty fantasy with a joyous laugh and a cheeky wink." Finally, **WELCOME TO NIGHT VALE** (★★★★★, 19 January, Orbit) will delight fans of the cultish podcast of the same name, set in a small desert town that's the site of all manner of weirdness. This spin-off novel centres on an urgent message from a man who's so eerily



forgettable that no one can quite remember what he wanted them to do... We said: "The writers have a well-practised rhythm that allows them to wring charm and humour from even the most grotesque ideas, and their distinctive style carries over seamlessly from audio to print."



THE X-FILES: ORIGINS

Teenage Agents Mulder, Scully

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

320/368 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Authors Kami Garcia/Jonathan Maberry

► Publisher Atom

◉ **The X-Files returned to TV** screens last year for a rather mixed set of six episodes; despite a handful of enjoyable moments, ultimately it was a let-down. If the teenage Mulder had been around to witness it, you can bet he'd have been disappointed. We learn here that the young Fox is pretty judgmental when it comes to sci-fi TV, at one point doubting a cop's professional abilities because he's wearing a *Battlestar Galactica* t-shirt instead of a *Star Trek* one.

Well, if you see someone wearing a *The X-Files: Origins* t-shirt the next time you're being interrogated by the police, you should congratulate them on their good taste, because YA origin stories *Agent Of Chaos* and *Devil's*

Advocate are both excellent. Going further than IDW's comics miniseries – which separates its X-leads, but at least features both of them in every issue – here one book (*Agent Of Chaos*) focuses on Mulder, while the other (*Devil's Advocate*) follows Scully. True to the TV series, which has them meeting for the first time as adults, these books keep them apart.

Which isn't to say they're not connected. They're both set in 1979 (Fox is 17, Scully 15), both feature last-gasp cameos from a major *X-Files* mythology character, both contain significant personality evolutions (Fox and Dana are on journeys to the personas we know), and both have twisty/entertaining plots. *Agent Of Chaos* sees Mulder investigating child disappearances, uncovering a dark conspiracy; meanwhile, in *Devil's Advocate*, Scully gets caught up in a sinister cult that has her believing in ghosts. But is there a rational explanation?

Forget the muddled TV return. Thanks to *Origins* we now want not one but two new *X-Files* shows – one following Mulder, and one following Scully. These books make us want to believe it's possible... **Sam Ashurst**

i Kami Garcia previously wrote a young Fox story for 2016 anthology *The Truth Is Out There* (edited by Jonathan Maberry).



A PROMISE OF FIRE

A guarantee of a shag

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

442 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Amanda Bouchet

► Publisher Platkus

◉ **Let's deal with the romance** first, because that's really what this book is about. It's your usual tale: man meets woman, they fight constantly, but they are fated to be together, so there'll be lots of euphemisms for feeling horny and some eventual knobbing. Abduction is not a good starting point for a relationship, but the romance genre is a funny one where pretty much everything – kidnapping, physical violence, refusal to listen to what the other person wants – constitutes deep and abiding love. Don't try it at home.

However, we're here for the fantasy. An awful lot of fantasy romances fall back on thinly-disguised historical settings. Amanda Bouchet doesn't do that, though her land divided into three kingdoms seems a fairly limited setting. Likewise the manoeuvrings for the thrones are fairly simplistic – though it's no worse than a lot of the average books filling up the fantasy shelves, which can be equally trite.

The really odd thing is the gods of this world: they're the Greek pantheon. It means Bouchet doesn't have to explain them, but it really does convey how limited her world-building is. Overall, a pretty weak book.

Miriam McDonald

i Worship of the ancient Greek gods is officially recognised in Greece – there are around 2,000 adherents.

“Thanks to this we now want two new *X-Files* shows”



THE STOLEN CHILD

With a faery, hand in hand



► **RELEASED 12 JANUARY**

336 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Lisa Carey

► Publisher Weidenfeld & Nicholson

❖ If words like “languid” and “haunting” and “ambiguous” make you roll your eyes, best pass onto the next review; Lisa Carey’s fifth novel is the very definition of slow burn, and all the better for it.

In 1959, American midwife Brigid travels to Ireland, to the remote island home of her namesake saint (and her own migrant mother), in search of a fabled healing well. Instead she finds herself drawn to her lonely, angry neighbour, Emer, and Emer’s eccentric, vulnerable son, Niall. Is Emer’s fear that Niall is a changeling simply an expression of her own unhappiness, or does something dark and powerful lurk on the island?

It’s a brave author who names their book after a Yeats poem. But Carey’s understated tale of complex women living complex lives is steeped in the strange, chilly tone of that 19th century verse. Yeats’s bittersweet refrain (“For the world’s more full of weeping than you can understand”) is encapsulated in both the day-to-day hardships of unhappy marriages and hard labour, and the longer-term decline of a community whose children invariably leave for a better life on the mainland. A challenging read, but a rewarding one. **Nic Clarke**

i When a creepy bloke complimented her eyes, St Brigid plucked one out and gave it to him. Hardcover.



AN OTHER PLACE

Package tour to hell



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

307 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Darren Dash

► Publisher Home Of The Damned Ltd

❖ It’s said that the archetypal story is to get a hero to climb a tree, then spend the middle act throwing rocks at him. This novel focuses on the “throwing rocks” bit. Its luckless hero starts out as a mildly discontented IT whiz; then he plunges into the Twilight Zone, moving from ghastly scenarios to even ghastlier scenarios with such horrid reliability that his story reads like extreme black comedy.

After enjoying Amsterdam with his hedonistic pals, puddle-shallow Newman Ripley is bundled on a plane for a mystery tour, destination unknown. Soon, things get extremely weird – we shouldn’t spoil too much, but the action revolves around a city and its “inhuman” people, providing endless puzzles for Newman and the reader.

Darren Dash is better known as teen horror author Darren Shan, but this is not definitely YA fiction (there are gut-munching massacres, and a heck of lot of sperm). The story throws new curveballs just when it seems to be going stale. Newman (narrating in an urgent present tense) often acts in revolting ways, yet with enough self-awareness to stay sympathetic. The ending is fair, if a bit of a letdown after the book’s biggest shocks. Morbidly entertaining. **Andrew Osmond**

i The author (real name Darren O’Shaughnessy) wrote *An Other Place* over 18 years, beginning it in 1998.



FROSTBLOOD

Flaming annoying



► **RELEASED 12 JANUARY**

384 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Elly Blake

► Publisher Hodder & Stoughton

❖ This YA debut follows a young woman, Ruby, who is a Fireblood – a magic user with an affinity for fire. Unfortunately she lives in Frostblood territory, where Firebloods are persecuted and killed. So of course Ruby goes and practises her magic in the woods near her hut, causing all sorts of tragedy and setting her on a path for revenge against the feared Frost King.

The biggest problem with *Frostblood* is its protagonist, who’s an incredibly difficult character to love (and this is meant to be a love story). She’s impetuous, selfish and needlessly rude to her allies – all in all, an unpleasant character to read about. If you can’t enjoy the main character what’s there to root for? Sure, the bad guys must be defeated, but without a connection to the heroine you might struggle to care whether she triumphs or not.

Frostblood does have some redeeming qualities. Some of the secondary characters are interesting: Arcus, the mysterious Frostblood and his mentor Brother Thistle don’t grate nearly as much as Ruby. And the magic and mythos, while a little familiar, are interesting and encourage a curiosity that may sustain you through to the end.

Bridie Roman

i Elly Blake is a big *Star Trek* fan. She and her husband watched a *Trek* movie on their first date; she wore a Data t-shirt!

ALSO OUT

One big release we were unable to review this issue (due to an embargo) is **CARVE THE MARK** (17 January, HarperCollins Children’s Books), by *Divergent*’s Veronica Roth. A *Star Wars*-y SF fantasy, it’s set on a planet where “everyone develops a current-gift, a unique power meant to shape the future”. We’ll bring you our verdict in *SFX* 284, when we’ll hopefully also look at **TALES FROM THE FORBIDDEN ZONE** (24 January, Titan Books) a 16-story collection set in the world of the original *Planet Of The Apes* series. Meanwhile, **THE DARK DAYS PACT** (26 January, Walker Books) sees Alison Hoodman continuing her *Lady Helen* trilogy, in which a super-strong heroine battles demons in 1812 – picture Buffy discovering her Slayer strength in repressed Regency England. Our reviewer awarded book one, *The Dark Days Club*, ★★★★★, calling it “a joy from start to finish”. Also getting a second outing: KM McKinley’s steampunk fantasy series *Gates Of The World*, set in a world shifting from magic to industry. We awarded series-opener *The Iron Ship* ★★★★★. **THE CITY OF ICE** (12 January, Solaris) continues the story, visiting an aeons-old city, deep in the polar south. Finally, there are also new entries for Sylvia Hunter’s *Midnight Queen* trilogy (**LADY OF MAGIC**, 10 January, Allison & Busby), and Greg Bear’s military SF saga *War Dogs* (**TAKE BACK THE SKY**, 26 January, Gollancz). **Phew!**



TRINITY

The Heroic Trio



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Comics**

► Writer **Francis Manapul**

► Artists **Francis Manapul, Clay Mann**

ISSUES 1-3 They're three of the best-known superheroes in the world, so it's no surprise that DC have once again brought Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman together for an ongoing series. Part of the DC *Rebirth* line, *Trinity* aims to give us a new, character-centric perspective on the trio, while also exploring how they represent different (and sometimes contrasting) aspects of the superhero archetype.

The basic set-up is that a visit to Smallville aimed at restoring

the bond between the three heroes results in them being taken on a mysterious tour of strangely altered versions of their past. They're soon forced to question their reality, but it becomes clear that there could be deadly consequences if they don't escape – especially since the villainous Poison Ivy is the one responsible for their predicament...

Written by Francis Manapul (best known for *The Flash*), *Trinity* largely steers clear of large-scale superhero punch-ups for a quieter, more reflective approach to DC's Big Three. It's a decision that leads to a number of effective moments in these first three issues, and is helped by some imaginative page layouts, even

“Has a satisfying sense of charm and character”

after Clay Mann takes over art duties in the third issue.

At its best, *Trinity* has a satisfying sense of charm and character. Unfortunately, there are also moments where Manapul's exploration of Superman and Batman's past tries to be profound but ends up falling flat. There's little here story-wise that feels genuinely fresh or new, and while the visuals are often gorgeous – especially thanks to Manapul doing all the art on issues one and two – the pacing is haphazard and lacks momentum.

Then there's the Superman-sized elephant in the room: the fact that instead of making *Trinity* an accessible jumping-on point, the series is wired into current DC continuity to a head-spinning degree. This means that much of the story is dealing with Superman's bewildering new status quo (where the most recent version of Superman has died and been replaced by the pre-*New 52* Superman), resulting in a script that's a little too heavy on the infodumps.

It's always possible these teething troubles may be worked out once the series gets a few more issues under its belt. *Trinity* has definite promise and moments that shine, but unlike some of *Rebirth*'s more successful titles, it isn't currently living up to the potential of its super-powered stars. **Saxon Bullock**

i Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman appeared together for the first time in 1947's *All-Star Comics* issue 36.



Worst lucky dip ever.

SURGEON X

The Drugs Don't Work



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Image Comics**

► Writer **Sara Kenney**

► Artist **John Watkiss**

ISSUES 1-3 It's not often that

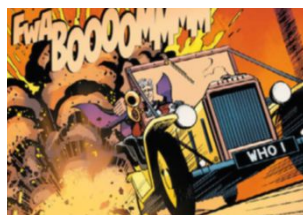
an editor receives a cover credit, but with her reputation preceding her, it's no surprise that Karen Berger (formerly Executive Editor of Vertigo) receives third billing on her first project for Image.

Given her experience, it's regrettable that Berger hasn't ironed out the flaws in Sara Kenney's otherwise promising comics debut. Strikingly illustrated by John Watkiss, it's set in a dystopian London devastated by an “antibiotics apocalypse”, with medicines strictly rationed.

With issue three listing 15 “key scientific consultants”, the documentarian has clearly painstakingly researched her harrowingly plausible scenario, but that doesn't always make for smooth reading, as the narrative is overloaded with exposition. The first issue opens with a terrorist attack on City Hall before flashing back to past events, and it would have been less confusing to get to know the characters first before being thrown into the action. Main character Rosa Scott doesn't endear herself either, as she quits her hospital job and turns vigilante surgeon. But with an intriguing subplot involving the death of Rosa's mother, *Surgeon X* is worth persevering with, if only for the sumptuous art. **Stephen Jewell**

i You can download a *Surgeon X* app with behind-the-scenes content, documentaries and black and white art.





Reversing the polarity: not a great idea.

DOCTOR WHO: THE THIRD DOCTOR

Three Two fun

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Titan Comics

► Writer Paul Cornell

► Artist Christopher Jones

ISSUES 1-3 After

last year's *Four Doctors* team-up, you'd have thought Paul Cornell would have been happy using just one of the Time Lord's incarnations when it came to this new series. But as the first issue cliffhanger reveals, opening story "The Heralds Of Destruction" also involves the Second Doctor, as an alien robot invasion of a Bedfordshire village turns out to be anything but routine.

It's set in the aftermath of "The Three Doctors", and Cornell throws in many delightful references to classic and current continuity. There's also a stunning twist at the end of the third issue which ensures that you re-evaluate all that has gone before.

With shades of Cornell's *This Damned Band*, the Third Doctor also takes a psychedelic trip into companion Jo Grant's groovy unconscious, expertly illustrated by Christopher Jones. Neatly capturing the likenesses of Pertwee's Doctor along with Roger Delgado's Master and the UNIT team, Jones makes a perfect foil for Cornell, who here produces some of his finest work in the Whoniverse. Shame, then, that this five-parter is set to be his last *Who* work. **Stephen Jewell**

i Cornell also has a new short story in anthology *The Mammoth Book Of The Mummy*, out at the end of the month.



Battle of the pointy chins.

SEVEN TO ETERNITY

A Fistful Of Magic

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher Image Comics

► Writer Rick Remender

► Artist Jerome Opeña

ISSUES 1-3 "Pulp craziness"

seems to be the default setting for writer Rick Remender, as he's been demonstrating in creator-owned Image Comics titles like crime thriller *Deadly Class* and sci-fi adventure *Black Science*. Now he's got a brand new series in which to showcase his wild imagination, and it's backed up by some truly jaw-dropping visuals.

Seven To Eternity plays like a lurid cross between *Conan*-style high fantasy and a bleak Sergio Leone-esque spaghetti Western. The story's set in Zhal, a world of myth and magic where the

“Remender cranks the weirdness up to admirable levels”

terrifying Mud King sees and knows all. Disgraced knight Adam Osidis has one chance to save his family – until his path crosses a gang of magic users determined to end the King's reign...

Remender has cranked the weirdness up to admirable levels here, presenting Zhal as a rich, complex world with secrets that are only just starting to reveal themselves. Admittedly, the ornate world-building sometimes gets a little excessive, making certain sequences baffling instead of intriguing, but even in its weaker moments *Seven To Eternity* always has the stunning art from Jerome Opeña to fall back on.

Remender and Opeña have collaborated before, and here the artist (with colourist Matt Hollingsworth) delivers incredible work, with every page packed full of imaginative designs and details. The overall structure for *Seven To Eternity* is already clear, and while there are occasional stumbles, this is shaping up to be another distinctive and memorable genre title from Image. **Saxon Bullock**

i Remender's comic *Deadly Class* is being developed as a TV series, with the Russo Brothers onboard as executive producers.



Is that the Face of Boe?

SCARLET TRACES

Volume One

The tripods walk again

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 12 JANUARY**

► Publisher Rebellion

► Writer Ian Edginton

► Artist D'Israeli

GRAPHIC NOVEL What happened

after the Martians were defeated in *The War Of The Worlds*? One of the more interesting potential answers can be found in *Scarlet Traces*, a comic series by Ian Edginton and D'Israeli that's been running intermittently since 2002.

This first collected volume starts with a brisk adaptation of *The War Of The Worlds* itself (first published in 2006), which channels HG Wells's visionary ideas and imagery into 65 pages. It's a vivid, well-crafted interpretation that also acts as a fantastic prologue, as the action then shifts forward to 10 years after the Martian defeat.

Set in a version of Britain that's utilised the invaders' technology to make itself an unstoppable global power, this first story arc of *Scarlet Traces* is a lurid mystery thriller that explores the darker side of the Victorian era, while also setting the scene for the stories to be collected in volume two. There are occasional weaknesses in the characterisation, but colourful world-building and D'Israeli's distinctive visual style balance out the small flaws. From its moody opening to the surprisingly bleak conclusion, this is an inventive and intriguing take on Wells's legendary novel. **Saxon Bullock**

i *Scarlet Traces* was first created as a semi-animated web serial, but the site shut down after a handful of episodes.

THE LAST GUARDIAN

Finally leaving the nest



► **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

► Reviewed on **PS4**

► Publisher **Sony**

VIDEOGAME Announced in 2007, originally for PS3, this fantasy adventure can make you feel so many strong emotions: fear, joy, elation, sadness. But was it worth the wait?

In many ways, it's a throwback. This is purely a story-driven single-player, third-person action adventure experience. You play a young boy who meets Trico, a combination of bird and cat who's injured, trapped, and as lost as you are. It's like the fable of a lion with a thorn in its foot, spread out over nine hours, with a friendship that grows and matures. Mostly you'll be clambering up scenery, solving puzzles, and riding Trico, but there are plenty of story beats.

Trico's design impresses. Whether shaking water off his body or preening himself, his appearance is a triumph. Good thing too, because he's a pain in the backside. The juxtaposition of the huge animal with the tiny child, on huge landscapes, leads to an occasionally confused direction. The camera will zoom in too closely at inopportune moments, then shift to the most inconvenient place. Mid-climb, you'll lose sight of what you're doing. And Trico can be excruciatingly annoying. After a while, you gain the ability to command him. Sometimes he'll do things after one prompt, sometimes three or four, or maybe he'll just ignore you for ages. Large parts of the game require clinging to your friend as he bounces from pillar to ledge. But sitting and waiting for Trico to do things isn't fun.

There's clearly been much love and time invested in making this a special game. Our hero limps if harmed, and whispers instead of shouting if in a dangerous environment. It's absurd how much emotion the two characters can convey. When the game hits its stride, you lose yourself in it. But the gameplay confusion can make for frustrating moments.

It's fantastic that there's a developer dedicated to making games that veer towards the artistic while retaining mechanics we know and enjoy. But *The Last Guardian* is full of design decisions that feel stuck in the past. Still, for every frustration there's an area to love exploring. Once the final scenes play out, it feels like a journey worth taking. **Adam Cook**

i Trico's name derives from "toriko", the Japanese for prisoner, which combines the words for bird ("tori") and cat ("neko").



Some Siamese cats are well/weird.



STARDUST

Beyond the Wall



► **RELEASED** OUT NOW!

(CD due 2 February)

114 minutes | Radio broadcast

(Now on iPlayer)

► Broadcaster **Radio Four**

Neil Gaiman's tale of a falling star, a wandering teenager and a village just on the edge of the land of Faerie has been an award-winning novel and an award-winning film, and both mediums brought their own blend of magic and marvel to the story. Now it's a radio show, and once again manages to fit its form brilliantly.

This "romance within the realms of Faerie" takes a classic tale of a young man's quest and fills it full of Gaiman-esque humour and twists, from a fallen star that turns out to be a living woman with a mind very much her own to the rapidly decreasing band of brothers looking to inherit their father's throne. With material this good, the challenge was always going to be living up to it, but it's one ably met by director Dirk Maggs, with this the most successful of his Gaiman adaptations to date.

Well paced and cast, with exquisite narration from Eleanor Bron and a wonderfully malevolent turn from Frances Barber as Morwag, it perfectly captures the Victorian village folk of Wall and the mischievous, playful feel of the land of Faerie beyond. Whether you've read the book or seen the film or are entirely new to the story, this is a fantastical delight to savour. **Rhian Drinkwater**

i Also on iPlayer: "The Duke Of Wellington Misplaces His Horse", by Susanna Clarke, set in *Stardust's* world.

FINAL FANTASY XV

Cruise control



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on **PS4**

► Also on **XO**

► Publisher **Square Enix**

VIDEOGAME We're introduced to

Prince Noctis and his black-clad entourage as they struggle to push a convertible along the road. Previous *Final Fantasy* games have opened with Mako Reactor assaults or futuristic cities being attacked by a giant fish monster; this sequel begins with grunts of exertion, backed by a cover of "Stand By Me".

It might seem a strange choice, but it's no coincidence Square Enix went for this song as *Final Fantasy XV*'s theme. While Noctis and pals aren't children, there are parallels with the coming-of-age movie where four boys set out on a quest to find a dead body. *FFXV*

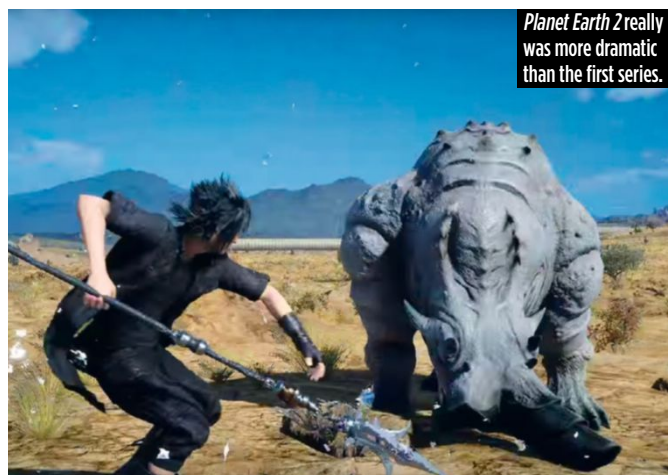
also sees a trip away from home teach four boys about friendship, responsibility, loyalty, and sacrifice. There's a doomsday plot too, but the main story thread's difficult to follow, with seemingly

important characters introduced and suddenly dropped, and influential events happening off-screen. Yet it's still enjoyable because of its solid backbone – those four pals and their road trip. They may look like *Thirty Seconds To Mars* got dropkicked through a comic con, but Noctis's friends are a likeable bunch.

This is the most accessible *Final Fantasy* yet, and by far the

most westernised. Combat is hyperactive, cathartic fun that has you zipping between enemies with teleport dashes, stringing combos together, switching weapons, dodging, parrying and countering, all in real-time. Moving around the world is less thrilling. During long drives, all you need to do is hold R2. There's only so much time you can spend panning a camera and watching androgynous anime boys' hair blowing in the wind like some Japanese L'Oréal advert.

So *Final Fantasy XV* has issues, but still ends up being one of the most enjoyable JRPG experiences of recent times, thanks to how likeable the boys are, how entertaining the combat is, and how gorgeous its fantasy world is. Though the story bewilders and blunders to its conclusion, the human element makes the ending impactful. It's a bumpy old ride, but it's worth seeing this road trip all the way through to its final destination. **Kirk McKeand**



i At one point Gladiolus wanders off for a bit; this is to facilitate a forthcoming DLC featuring the mulleted hunk.

DOCTOR WHO Original Sin/Cold Fusion

Murder, mystery and multiple Doctors...

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

120 minutes | 180 minutes | CD/download

► Publisher **Big Finish**

AUDIO DRAMA Big Finish's run of

adaptations of old *Doctor Who* novels continues with two adventures featuring lesser-known spin-off companions Roz Forrester and Chris Cwej, starting with their debut story *Original Sin*

★★★★★. First published in the *New Adventures* series in 1995, it's a pulpy, galaxy-spanning thriller that sees the Doctor (Sylvester McCoy) and Bernice Summerfield (Lisa Bowerman) getting involved in a mystery involving a missing spacecraft, and soon being hunted for

murder by intergalactic cops Forrester (Yasmin Bannerman) and Cwej (Travis Oliver).

The story delivers strong performances, colourful sci-fi concepts and an enjoyable sense of scale that's closer to traditional space opera. Unfortunately, there are also a number of clichés on display, alongside some clunky moralising; the continuity-

dependent big twist is a bit of a let-down; and both Roz and Chris feel so bland here that it's almost a surprise when they end up as companions.

Far more effective is *Cold Fusion* ★★★★★, the first book adapted from the *Missing Adventures* series, and an interesting take on the multi-Doctor story. The focus here is on the Fifth Doctor (Peter

Davison) who arrives on a frozen colony world in the far future with Adric, Nyssa and Tegan, only to find that he's *already* wanted as a terrorist. In fact, he's accidentally crossed paths with the Seventh Doctor, Roz and

Chris, but that's soon the least of his worries thanks to an ancient device, ghostly apparitions and a hibernating Time Lord...

Running at six episodes across three hours, *Cold Fusion* is more gently paced than *Original Sin* but also more satisfying, combining witty dialogue with gnarly SF world-building. There are a few

“Contrasts two very different eras of *Who*”

creaky supporting performances and a dose of *Who*'s often-impenetrable mid-'90s mythology, but the lead actors do sterling work, and overall this is a lively adventure that successfully contrasts two very different eras in *Who*'s history. **Saxon Bullock**

i Also out (on 5 January): *The Lost Angel*, an original Twelfth Doctor adventure from BBC Audio. Review next issue!





COLLECTABLES

Things we've been playing with this month

1 The year: 2056. A middle-aged man sits wearing a weary, rueful smile. *Star Wars: Episode XXI* has just hit multimultimaxplexes accompanied by the usual merchandise torrent, including a load of mini-figures just like the **Star Wars Universe 3.75" figures** (FPI price £8.99 each; product codes F5081, F5082, F5083, F5085, F5086) that he

chucked out years ago – Kylo Ren, K-2SO, Imperial Ground Crew, Jyn Erso and a Stormtrooper. Shouldn't have done it – especially since they were really well detailed, with nifty add-ons, like Jyn's projectile-firing weapon. Silly sod!

2 Funko's ongoing world domination programme moves to its next phase

with these **Mega Pop! plushes** (FPI price £24.99 each; product codes F5001, F5005), which apply the oversized-bounce stylings of its vinyl figures to 16" cuddly toys. On the left we have *The Nightmare Before Christmas's* Jack Skellington; over yonder on the right, DC's Spider-Gwen – we particularly like her shiny hood. This is just a small sample of a

range which also includes Batman, Deadpool and Harley Quinn.

3 Enigmatic *Deep Space Nine* warmongers the Breen have inexplicably jumped franchises to land on this **Rogue One Death Trooper travel mug** (FPI price £9.99; product code F4698). What other explanation could there be for the Death Trooper's long muzzle and luminous green detailing, much more Alpha Quadrant than galaxy far, far away? Either this is the epic *Trek/Wars* crossover we've been waiting for our whole lives, or it's an invitation for Hollywood's impoverished rights lawyers to earn some much-needed post-Christmas cash.

All products are available at

forbiddenplanet
international
home shopping

www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk
01621 877 222

Reviews



4 Aren't you a little tall for a Stormtrooper? The latest wave of **Star Wars Black Series figures** (FPI price £22.99 each; product codes F5075, F5079, F5080) includes a slender Rogue One Death Trooper who positively towers over his white-and-black cousins, and looks like he could do with a good meal. Looking significantly healthier are Jyn Erso in her Jedha gear, and Cassian Andor all toggled up for Eadu. Also available: grumpy droid K-2SO.

5 Ellen Ripley isn't the luckiest of people, but the stoic expression on this figure suggests that she's taking it all in her stride. That's probably thanks to her dope futuristic

high-tops and chunky yellow Power Loader. This nifty **Aliens ReAction figure set** (FPI price £24.99; product code F3096) also features a large, detailed and very shiny Alien Queen. Her legs frequently give way (even Xenomorphs like their gin), but the spiny tail acts as a useful prop.

6 Nope, this **Harley Quinn Bottle Opener** (FPI price £14.00; product code F3017) isn't *Suicide Squad* merch – it features a likeness of the mallet-wielding mistress of mayhem as she appeared in *Batman: The Animated Series*. Measuring 4" long, it has magnets on the back so you can slap it on the fridge. Unfortunately, gripping it involves

putting your thumb over both of Harley's intimate lady areas, which feels faintly improper – but then, you perverts probably consider that a selling point.

7 Even condiments have a role to play in the ceaseless fight against crime, citizens. Just take a look at this pair of **Batman salt and pepper shakers** (FPI price £9.99; product code F4828), ready to defend your innocent plate of egg and chips against the bland taste of injustice. Place them together on your table and watch as they unite to form the mighty Bat-symbol, beacon of hope to all. Why, it's like a shamelessly strained metaphor for the Dynamic Duo themselves. ●

THINGS TO COME

More goodies on their way soon



ETA
TBC
EXPECT TO PAY
£17

AT-ACT KIT

◆ This *Rogue One* Walker pieces together from 45 parts, but requires no glue or tools to assemble, making it suitable for kids aged six and over. It's just one of four "build and play" kits coming from model manufacturers Revell.



ETA
JUNE
EXPECT TO PAY
£80

PUNISHER RETRO FIGURE

◆ The latest riff on the Mego toys of the '70s is this limited edition set featuring the Marvel vigilante. You get one retro-look figure, plus swappable heads and outfits so you can play dress-up with little Frankie. Bless.



ETA
JULY
EXPECT TO PAY
£35 EACH

DAWN OF THE DEAD DOLLS

◆ Mezco pay tribute to George Romero's classic 1978 film with two more of their 10"-high Living Dead Dolls: chopper pilot Stephen (aka "Flyboy") in undead form, and the rot-faced "plaid shirt zombie" from the poster. Gross!

Photography by Olly Curtis



SEASON 1

WESTWORLD

Oh my god, they killed Teddy

► **UK Broadcast** Sky Atlantic, finished
► **US Broadcast** HBO, finished
► **Episodes Reviewed** 1.01-1.10

◉ **"It's a tricky thing, weaving the old into the new,"** chuckles Robert Ford (Anthony Hopkins) in episode three of *Westworld*. It's a statement that operates on so many levels, "meta" doesn't quite cover it. It also sparked a conspiracy theory among fans who were ultimately vindicated in the show's finale. *Westworld* is all games within games; a frequently frustrating but equally fascinating mash-up of different levels of reality that reflected the themes of

a show about the fragility of perception, artificial or otherwise.

When Ford talks of weaving the old into the new, he's talking about using new technology on old androids. He could just as easily be talking about taking an old film like *Westworld* (1973) and giving it a 21st century makeover. So now the plot isn't just about robots at a theme park developing glitches and becoming killers, it's about the nature of AI and robotic self-determination; Asimov given a Philip K Dick reality check. In the end, we also learn he's talking about the very nature of the show itself, but... spoilers!

It's a dangerous game – or series of games, or concentric circle of games, or whatever – to play, one which could have seen disconcerted viewers switching off in droves. And at times that option was tempting. Instead the show evolves into a beautiful puzzle, inscrutable but somehow still utterly compelling, with enough narrative cohesion and plot hooks to draw you back, convinced that next week it would all make sense.

Which in the end it does, just as long as you don't comb through the details too meticulously...

It would be easy to dismiss the final episode's revelations about the

ZOOM IN



BEST MOMENT ▲

→ Maeve's first journey through Westworld's backstage in 1.06 "The Adversary" finishing with her watching herself in a promo on a massive video screen.

BEST EPISODE

→ "Trompe L'Oeil" (1.07): Bernard's secret revealed! Theresa murdered! Exploding corpse! Epic horseback action sequence!

TRIVIA

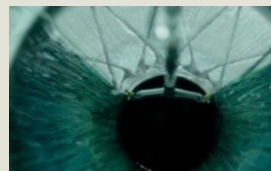
→ Songs heard on the player piano include "Black Hole Sun" (Soundgarden), "No Surprises" (Radiohead), "The House Of The Rising Sun" (The Animals) and "Back To Black" (Amy Winehouse).

DID YOU SPOT

→ The gunslinger from the 1973 film (as played by Yul Brynner) makes a brief cameo in 1.06 "The Adversary".

SF MOMENT OF THE YEAR ▼

→ The shot of an eyeball being created in 1.03 "The Stray" is so beautiful we absolve CGI of any responsibility for the *Transformers* films.





The escalator is actually going up, they're just facing the wrong way.

show's structure as a gimmick. In fact it reveals a show that has been putting the audience in the place of its characters in about as pure a way as TV could ever achieve. The android "hosts" struggle to make sense of their lives because their memories are the playthings of the scientists who created them. And that's what watching the show is like for the viewers: the scriptwriters were fracturing our understanding of what was going on. We were *their* playthings.

But we were willing participants because, pretentious as all that might sound, the show is all kinds of fun too, and exquisitely made. It may have cost a fortune but the money is on screen with some breathtaking visuals; not just the CG but the outstanding beauty of the Wild West too, gloriously shot on good old fashioned film (there it goes, weaving old into new again). The pilot has a spectacular bank robbery set to an orchestral version of "Paint It Black" that sets the show's stall when it comes to outrageous and highly entertaining action scenes. There's some delicious black humour

“A beautiful puzzle, inscrutable but utterly compelling”

throughout (Teddy dying virtually every week has to be a *South Park* gag, surely?), as well as moments so poignant it breaks your heart.

It's not flawless. The nudity borders on gratuitous at times, and there's a massive missed opportunity to discuss how a Wild West park deals with the issue of native Americans. Occasionally the storytelling becomes too enigmatic for its own good, and Ford's speechifying could happily have been rationed out.

You can forgive all that, though, because *Westworld* as a whole is a mighty fine undertaking; intelligent, thought-provoking, visually stunning and more entertaining than 99.9% of ordinary Westerns. **Dave Golder**



Something told him this wasn't the best time to be selling life insurance.

★ BEST IN SHOW ★

The characters who make TV great



BARBARA KEAN

Gotham brings us one of television's most spectacular character turnarounds

► UK Broadcast Channel 5, TBC ► US Broadcast Fox, Mondays

✦ It's hard to believe that the Barbara Kean we see on our screens in *Gotham* today is the same Barbara Kean we saw in the show's first season. Back then, she was the epitome of a "love interest": you could picture her winking out of existence every time boyfriend Jim Gordon wasn't on screen. Season one's Barbara was *useless* – a whining, crying damsel in distress who existed for no other reason than for Jim to worry about her. Fans hated her. The writers didn't seem to know what to do with her. Lord only knows how poor Erin Richards felt about playing such a spineless wet flannel.

And then... Barbara went mad.

Sure, it was a bit embarrassing at first. The contrast between Boring Barbara and Bonkers Barbara was too striking to convince – and it didn't help that the writers decided to spice things up by having her turn

gay, which is, all too often, more of a lame attempt to lure in male viewers than it is anything to do with creating a real character. For a while in season two, Barbara seemed to exist purely to titillate; she acted crazy because it was sexy. Yawn.

However, as *Gotham* hit its third season and Barbara settled into her role as a nightclub owner alongside girlfriend Tabitha, something became clear: Barbara is brilliant. She's hit her stride. The woman who cowered at crime now gleefully calls Penguin "Pengie" and isn't scared of *anything*. She's smart, she's funny and she's inventively, beautifully barmy. We'd watch an entire show all about her and Tabitha running a gin joint and taking down mobsters who sass them. That one-dimensional, pointless girlfriend has finally winked out for good, and the woman who's replaced her is a blast. Who saw *that* coming? **Jayne Nelson**

"Ground floor: crucifixes, tasers and holy water."



SERIES 1

CRAZYHEAD

Howard's Slay

► **UK Broadcast** E4, finished
► **US Broadcast** Netflix, available now
► **Episodes Reviewed** 1.01-1.06

✶ We've missed Howard

Overman. Yes, the creator of *Misfits* has, since that show came to an end, contributed scripts to *Atlantis* (which he also co-created), but they were pretty decaffeinated compared to the off-the-hook Overman who brought us Asbo superheroes. So it's a delight to see him – as a *Crazyhead* character might put it – going balls out again.

Like *Misfits*, *Crazyhead* takes a well-worn fantasy concept – in this case demonic possession – and strives to make it accessible to a wider audience. Cara Theobald plays Amy, who discovers that rather than having mental health

issues she is a "see-er" with the ability to see the faces of demons walking among us. Susan Wokoma is Raquel, the socially awkward self-taught demon-hunter who then befriends her.

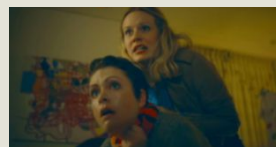
As with *Misfits*, the fantastical elements are firmly grounded in workaday reality. As with *Misfits*, there's no dense mythology to wrap your head around – these girls are making it up as they go along, reliant on Google for their demonic lore. And as with *Misfits*, the scripts are peppered with scabrous humour.

Is it as successful as *Misfits*? Well, not quite – but there's no shame in that, and it's a pretty close-run thing. In one respect, *Crazyhead* actually bests its predecessor: the focus on Amy and Raquel's developing bond

means that this is a show with real warmth and heart. Indeed, it's a little disappointing that it doesn't tack further in that direction, as cumulatively the piss, shit and gay sex gags can get a little wearing. The arc plot – such as it is – is nothing to write home about. And you have to feel for Arinzé Kene, lumbered with the role of Raquel's brother Tyler, a hunk with no discernible personality; when Amy's workmate/wannabe-boyfriend Jake (the excellent Lewis Reeves) dismisses him as "Coldplay" you can only nod in agreement.

On the plus side there are some interesting twists on the genre – particularly a possessed single mum who retains feelings for her human son. *Defiance*'s Tony Curran is dependably good value as the perfectionist Callum, the series' demonic Big Bad. And that central female friendship is strong enough to hold everything together. No *Misfits* then, but no misfire – and as "British *Buffy*"s go, arguably more successful than *Class*. **Ian Berriman**

ZOOM IN



BEST MOMENT ▲

→ When Raquel gets in a playroom punch-up with demonic single mum Mercy (1.04), and stabs her in the tit with a toy plane. Ouch.

BEST LINES

→ Callum: "We all know what happened to the dodos." Raquel: "Did they have sex with your mum?"

TRIVIA

→ Three of the regulars had minor roles in the final series of *Misfits*: Susan Wokoma (as Roz – whoever the hell she was – in 5.04); Lewis Reeves (Ben, who faked terminal illness in 5.06); and Riann Steele (nurse Naomi in 5.04).

THE NAME GAME

→ When originally announced, the show was called *Crazy Face*. Which means we can never remember what the hell the correct title is!

LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION ▼

→ If you're ever in Bristol, take a stroll down the harbourside past Amy's flat (22 Liberty Gardens, BS1 6JW). The idea that a bowling alley employee could afford to live there is the most fantastical thing about the series...





LINE UP

The month's most quotable dialogue

JAKE

"Feelings have to run both ways. Otherwise, it's just like masturbating into naan bread."

Crazyhead,
Episode 1.04



BALLON

"Are kittens dangerous?"

MISS QUILL

"Only if you insult their worshippers online."

Class,
Episode 1.07



LUCIFER

"I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me Dad."

Lucifer,
Episode 2.10



DIRK GENTLY
"Time? I laugh at the concept. I can spend a whole day without even trying."

Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency,
Episode 1.01



ARMISTICE

"Gods are pussies."

Westworld,
Episode 1.10



SCRIPT EASE

A TV season distilled

SEASON 2

LEGENDS OF TOMORROW

Time-travel superteam or history's janitors?



► UK Broadcast Sky 1
► US Broadcast The CW
► Episodes Reviewed 2.01-2.05

VOICEOVER

Previously, on *Legends Of Tomorrow*... Time traveller RIP

HUNTER assembled a motley crew of second division DC characters too obscure or silly-sounding to get their own shows:

FIRESTORM!
HAWKGIRL!
HAWKMAN!
CAPTAIN COLD!
HEATWAVE!
WHITE CANARY!
THE ATOM! They were not heroes, they were legends! Who bickered a lot.

Together they chased a panto villain through time until they realised their true enemies were RIP's bosses, the Time Masters. So they killed them all. CAPTAIN COLD sacrificed himself in the process, which was sad, but does mean the other characters in season

two get more dialogue since they don't have to wait 20 minutes every time

Wentworth Miller delivers a line really slowly. Oh and HAWKGIRL and HAWKMAN flew off because they were dull.

Now, on season two...

RIP HUNTER

Right I'm going to vanish for a while because I've got a better offer on *Broadchurch* series three but first I'm going to send all you lot to different points in history...

THE ATOM

Why?

RIP

Because I need to put the Waverider on a collision course with a nuclear missile and it may not survive the blast.

WHITE CANARY
But why not send us all to the same time and place?

RIP

What would be the fun in that? Bye.

A big explosion takes place. The Atom wakes up in prehistoric times and is chased by dinosaurs until a historian called Nate Heywood arrives.

NATE

Hey, I'm travelling through time collecting Legends of Tomorrow. We can form a new band, then work together saving history from temporal tampering. And you can meet my grandad, Commander Steel, and his buddies, the Justice Society.

THE ATOM

Sounds cool. Can we get autographs?

NATE

And if at some point you can use some special serum to save

my life and turn me into a bargain-basement Colossus, that'd be great.

The new team meets the Justice Society, and pick up one of their members too: Vixen.

VIXEN

I am woman. Hear me roar. No, really, hear me roar. I have this "I can be like animals" superpower going on.

NATE

We thought it was important to keep our "nature-themed superheroine" quota as high as possible.

VIXEN

Hey, you can talk, Rip-shaped-hole-filling, hair-gelled white boy.

VOICEOVER

Next time on *Legends Of Tomorrow*: some leftover bad guys from *Arrow* and *The Flash* do some ranting.

Dave Golder

At least there'll be no awkward "up against the wall" shots.



SEASON 7

THE WALKING DEAD

Or should that be walking wounded?

► **UK Broadcast** Fox, midseason break
 ► **US Broadcast** AMC, midseason break
 ► **Episodes Reviewed** 7.01-7.08

❗ **It doesn't take much to fall** from grace. *The Walking Dead* has sat at the top of the pop culture pecking order for so long, it was due a proper backlash. And yet this year the show has seemed to go out of its way to alienate viewers.

The first order of business was tying up *that* cliffhanger. After spending most of the year teasing who might get their head caved in with a baseball bat, the show "surprised" us by offing both Abraham and Glenn – an outcome that most fans had worked out months before.

In the wake of these events it makes sense that Rick would

spend most of the season in a state of numb depression. Unfortunately, that tone infects the show as a whole. The unexpected comedy of "The Well" aside, it's a half season where the characters you like suffer and the characters you don't – or, more likely, just don't care about (Spencer, Tara, Enid et al) – hog the screen-time. King Ezekiel is a lovely, surprising addition, but where the hell is Michonne for most of the run? Devoting entire episodes to individual groups and characters also has the knock on effect of sucking momentum from the series.

But let's cut to the chase: the root of the problem is Negan. Jeffrey Dean Morgan certainly makes an impact – but mainly because he seems to be in every

other scene. He's a boring villain, invincible only because the people who try to kill him are so utterly useless, and his schtick (getting angry and swear with a big shit-eating grin or pretending to be nice before swearing with a big shit-eating grin) quickly wears thin. Turns out that, in 2016, watching a smirking sexual predator stomp all over everyone else is surprisingly un-fun.

The final episode shows some signs of life. Characters are reunited and there's a glimmer of hope as Rick finally gets his mojo back. But did we need to wait *eight weeks* to get to this point? *The Walking Dead* can still deliver, but this year has highlighted the problems that come with sticking too closely to the source material.

Will Salmon

ZOOM IN

BEST EPISODE

→ "Heart's Still Beating" (7.08). Finally, progression and optimism. And all it cost was two forgettable secondary characters.

TRIVIA

→ Negan was originally based – visually at least – on Henry Rollins, according to artist Charlie Adlard. Rollins even auditioned for the part.

BEST LINE

→ Father Gabriel emerged as an unexpected favourite, especially after telling Spencer, "What you're saying doesn't make you a sinner – but it does make you a tremendous shit".

DID YOU SPOT

→ Negan's line, "you don't scare easy" while interrogating Daryl is a direct callback to Big D's brother Merle saying the same thing to Glenn.

WTF? ▼

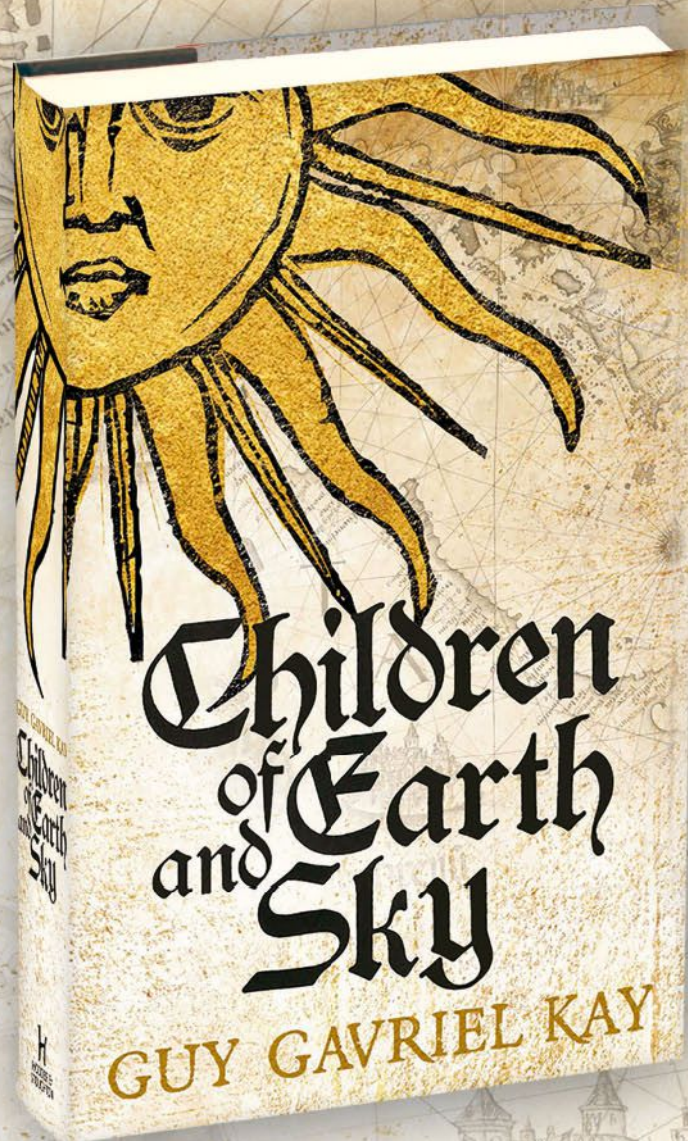
→ So, what exactly was going on with Rick's axe in episode one? One moment it's in a crowd of zombies, the next it's on top of an RV...



When history changes Legends emerge

'[An] engrossing
fantasy of
plotting nations,
colliding religions,
and shifting
alliances'

Publisher's Weekly



'The greatest
living author of
epic fantasy'

Brandon Sanderson

'The heir to
Tolkien's tradition'

Booklist

The sweeping new novel
from the beloved author of *Tigana*

Dirk's a bright lad.

SEASON 1

DIRK GENTLY'S HOLISTIC DETECTIVE AGENCY

As British as American football, and just as silly

► **UK Broadcast** Netflix, available now
► **US Broadcast** BBC America, finished
► **Episodes Reviewed** 1.01-1.03

◉ An American reboot of

Douglas Adams's quintessentially British book series might seem like a peculiar idea, and there's no denying that this Netflix/BBC America show suffers because of this culture clash – mainly from the dissonance between US actor Elijah Wood as its lead, the hapless loser Todd, and Brit Samuel Barnett as the almost-as-hapless titular detective, Dirk Gently.

While it's fitting for Barnett's Dirk to feel as though he's in a different show to everybody else – he's an Englishman abroad, after all – it's also deeply distracting, as Wood's dramatic intensity keeps ricocheting off Barnett's posh

squawking and flailing. And by god, the end result is weird.

Then again, as anyone who's read the Dirk Gently books can tell you, "weird" is appropriate. And there's a lot of it to get your teeth into here, as a reluctant Todd teams up with the manic Dirk to investigate the disappearance of a woman who now thinks she's a dog. Clues have a way of showing up because everything in Dirk's life is interconnected, from the random lady chained up above Todd's apartment to the madwoman on a road-tripping kill-spree. Add to this some kind of conspiracy, a secret laboratory and some bonkers, Rube Goldberg-esque chains of events and... well, you certainly won't get bored.

But is it any good? If you're a fan of the books, you might not be

able to handle all the changes (the fact that Dirk isn't the main lead is the biggest issue, though understandable when we needed a "sane" character like Todd to empathise with). However, if you can watch this as a standalone show about a guy who ends up as an unwilling sidekick to a British lunatic, you might enjoy yourself. Rather like the recent *Preacher*, this is an anarchic, unpredictable and often gory delight – only without all the dull bits where nothing happens.

Plus you can't deny that in Adams's fundamental theory that "everything is connected", he hit a motherlode that works really well on TV. *Dirk Gently* has already nabbed a second season, so those connections will roll on for a while yet. **Jayne Nelson**

ZOOM IN



BEST MOMENT ▲

→ It's always a bit embarrassing when a best moment might not even be scripted, but Todd karate-kicking the shower curtain that's stuck on his clothes (1.02) is basically Wood having a monumentally funny freakout.

FAMILY TIES

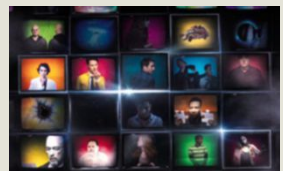
→ Holistic assassin Bart Curlish is played by Fiona Dourif – daughter of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, *Lord Of The Rings* and *Child's Play* star Brad. They appeared together in *Curse Of Chucky*.

DID YOU SPOT?

→ Dirk mentions that he's met Thor ("He's not nearly as good-looking as people say"). Thor actually appeared in the second Dirk Gently novel, *The Long Dark Tea-Time Of The Soul*.

TRIVIA ▼

→ The television screens you see at the start of each episode keep changing – and are worth rewinding and watching, as you see a few things that are interesting...





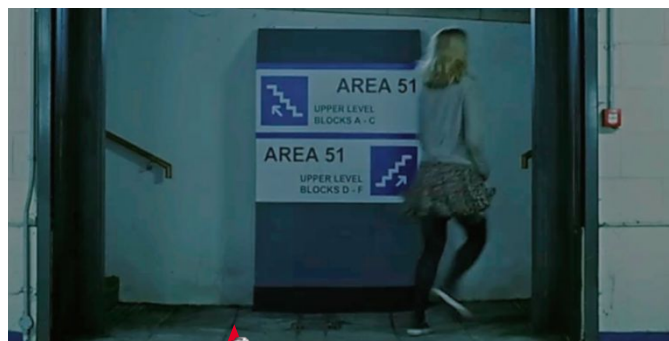
SPURIOUS AWARDS

Celebrating the silliest and strangest moments from the month in TV



TRIBUTE OF THE MONTH

We had a tear in our eye at *Yonderland's* lovely (and completely on-theme) tribute to David Bowie. RIP Goblin King indeed.



IN-JOKE OF THE MONTH

We presume *Crazyhead* didn't actually find a car park that had an Area 51. If it did, is that where aliens park their ships?



MEDICAL ALERT OF THE MONTH

With the Trickster's colostomy bag about to burst, Jay Garrick offers his helmet, in *The Flash*.



NOVELTY BEER TAP OF THE MONTH

Bloody Marys on draft! Every horror-themed gastro pub should have one. Thanks for the idea, *The Walking Dead*.



SEX GAMES OF THE MONTH

"You might have the horn but I am not inserting that anywhere, thank you very much," says Todd in *Dirk Gently*.



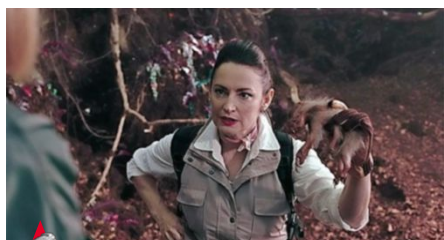
HEALTH AND SAFETY WARNING OF THE MONTH

Sorry, Supergirl, but we're pretty sure cooking the Thanksgiving turkey with your laser vision is a surefire route to salmonella.



ART CRITIC OF THE MONTH

Emma desperately tries to find something nice to say about Regina's "Blue Period" art exhibition in *Once Upon A Time*.



WORST KIDS' ENTERTAINER OF THE MONTH

Dorothea puts on lamest puppet show ever in *Class*.



GUEST STAR OF THE MONTH

In *Humans*, Green Arrow should have gone to Specsavers.



STRICTLY FINALISTS OF THE MONTH

Lucifer and Ella practise their tango in *Lucifer*.

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1977

How much do you know about the year that changed everything?

Quizmaster Nick Setchfield, Features Editor

QUESTION 1

Which future *Dallas* star played the lead role in *Man From Atlantis*?

QUESTION 2

Starsky And Hutch's David Soul had a number one with "Silver Lady". Which 1967 *Star Trek* episode did he appear in?

QUESTION 3

Which of these strips did not appear in the first issue of 2000 AD? a) *Dan Dare* b) *Harlem Heroes* c) *Judge Dredd*

QUESTION 4 PICTURE QUESTION

Steven Spielberg cast which French New Wave director as Lacombe in *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*?

QUESTION 5

Which 1977 Philip K Dick novel finally came to the screen in 2006, directed by Richard Linklater?

QUESTION 6

Which James Bond star popped up in John Landis's *Kentucky Fried Movie*?

QUESTION 7

ITV's teatime chiller *Children Of The Stones* was filmed in which English village?

QUESTION 8 PICTURE QUESTION

Capricorn One was about a government conspiracy to fake a landing... where?

QUESTION 9

Which of these was not a movie this year? a) *Kingdom Of The Spiders* b) *Empire Of The Ants* c) *Realm Of The Beetles*



QUESTION 4



QUESTION 8



QUESTION 10



QUESTION 20

QUESTION 10 PICTURE QUESTION

Who played the Arabian adventurer in *Sinbad And The Eye Of The Tiger*?

QUESTION 11

What was the title of '77's sequel to '75 dino flick *The Land That Time Forgot*?

QUESTION 12

Leela appeared for the first time in *Doctor Who*. What was the name of her tribe?

QUESTION 13

George RR Martin's first novel was published this year. What was it called?

QUESTION 14

Which iconic sci-fi sound opens Ash's 1996 album 1977?

QUESTION 15

Eraserhead, starring Jack Nance, marked the feature film directing debut of which auteur of the weird?

QUESTION 16

Which TV show saw a group of people whisked through the Bermuda Triangle to a strange new dimension?

QUESTION 17

Joanna Lumley played Purdey in *The New Avengers*. What inspired the name of her character?

QUESTION 18

Former squeeze of Prince Andrew Koo Stark's scenes were cut from *Star Wars*. Which of Luke's friends did she play?

QUESTION 19

Which German-born actor played sinister shipping magnate Karl Stromberg in James Bond blockbuster *The Spy Who Loved Me*?

QUESTION 20 PICTURE QUESTION

Who played HG Wells's crazed scientist in this year's film adaptation of *The Island Of Dr Moreau*?



Answers
1 Patrick Duffy 2 "The Apple"
3 (c) Judge Dredd 4 Francois Truffaut
5 A Scanner Darkly 6 George Lazenby 7 Avebury 8 Mars 9 (c) Realm Of The Beetles
10 Patrick Wayne 11 The People That Time Forgot 12 The Sevateem
13 Dying Of The Light 14 The roar of a TIE Fighter from Star Wars
15 David Lynch 16 The Fantastic Journey 17 A British brand of shotgun 18 Camie 19 Curt Jurgens
20 Burt Lancaster

How did you do?

Pop gold or chart disgrace?



→ 0-5
Paul Nicholas



→ 6-10
Brotherhood Of Man



→ 11-15
Showaddywaddy



→ 16-19
Abba



→ 20
David Bowie

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi



THE USS KELVIN

Richard Edwards, Editor

It's easy to forget just how adrift the *Star Trek* franchise was a decade ago. The mediocre *Nemesis* had bombed at the cinema. *Enterprise* didn't manage to make it past a fourth season. It was a property in big need of a spectacular rescue.

So JJ Abrams was arguably taking on his own Kobayashi Maru test when he agreed to reboot the series. By his own admission, he'd always preferred *Star Wars* to *Trek*, but he had the guts to bring something new to the table – a more muscular, action-oriented take on the Federation, that kept tachyon pulses and holodecks to a minimum. With the opening scene of *Star Trek* he completely nailed it, a sequence that ranks among the best space-set action ever put on screen. In fact, I don't think anything in the rebooted *Trek* movies has even come close to the brilliance of those wonderful first 10 minutes.

The movie's pre-publicity made a big thing of bringing back Kirk and Spock, but here they were simply supporting players – the old Spock “Prime” just a projection on board the Romulan ship, James T Kirk still in his mother's womb. Instead, we're transported directly to the bridge of the previously unmentioned USS Kelvin, crewed by unknown Starfleet personnel in unfamiliar uniforms. We're already a good way



into the sequence when we learn that the young first officer elevated to the captain's chair for a few short minutes has a very famous surname...

Abrams instantly establishes his own visual language light years away from traditional *Trek*, with audacious camera moves that discard conventional notions of up and down, a crew member sucked into the dead silence of space, and yes, that infamous lens flare.

But for all the state-of-the-heart blockbuster brilliance, I love the USS Kelvin sequence for its emotional power. We barely know George and Winona Kirk, yet *Star Trek*'s opening has me welling up every time I see it. The moment George realises he'll have to sacrifice himself to save his family and 800 shipmates, the birth of baby Jim, that teary conversation about what to name him (“Tiberius? That's the worst!”)... It's all perfectly calibrated to tug at the heartstrings, while being 100 per cent relevant to the plot *and* having the convenient side-effect of resetting the timeline. I can't think of a better 10 minutes in the history of blockbuster cinema. ●

Rich struggled with lens flare on his drive to work this morning.

Fact Attack!

→ The Kelvin is named after Abrams' maternal grandfather, Harry – the NCC-0514 registry number references his birthday.

→ The stardate format here is different to what's in the TV shows. 2233.4 is equivalent to 4 January 2233; the stardates in *Next Gen* are in the 40,000s!

→ Jim Kirk will cross paths with his dad, with Chris Hemsworth set to return for the fourth movie as “a man he never had a chance to meet”.

→ Composer Michael Giacchino struggled with the theme, until a producer told him, “Write a score for a film about two people that meet.”

SEE YOU
NEXT MONTH!
1 FEB
DETAILS ON
PAGE 41

Douglas Adams' classic Doctor Who story *The Pirate Planet* has finally been novelised by JAMES GOSS!



With extra material and notes from Adams himself, this is essential reading for fans of all ages



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